Social Psychology

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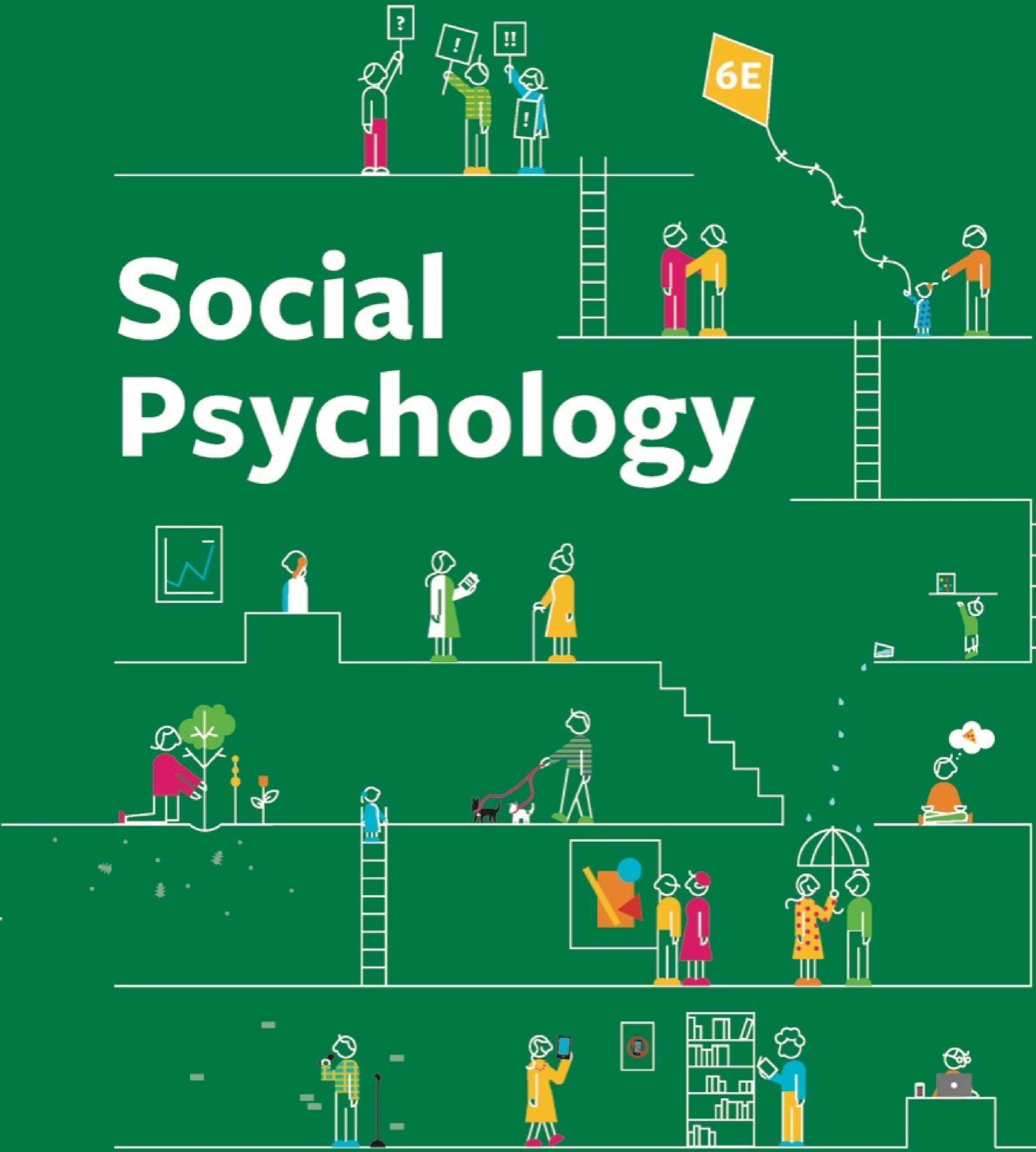

Gilovich · Chen · Keltner · Nisbett

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Social Psychology

SIXTH EDITION

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We dedicate this book to

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Mollie McNeil and Natalie and Serafina Keltner-McNeil

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PREFACE

A FRESH PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Social psychology illuminates the nature of everyday social life. It’s a science that offers novel insights into the foundations of moral sentiments, the origins of violence, and the reasons people fall in love. It provides basic tools for understanding racial bias and how we might curb it, how people persuade one another, why people trust and cooperate with each other, and how people rationalize their undesirable actions. Social psychology offers scientifically grounded answers to questions human beings have been thinking about since we started to reflect on who we are: Are we rational creatures? How can we find happiness? What is the proper relationship of the individual to the larger society? How are we shaped by the culture in which we are raised?

After decades of collective experience teaching social psychology, we decided at the turn of the twenty-first century to put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and write our own vision of this fascinating discipline. It was an ideal time to do so. Many new developments in the field were reshaping social psychology. Exciting new research had revealed how different kinds of culture—country of origin, regional culture, social class—shape human thought, feeling, and action. Evolutionary theory was helping to guide how social psychologists study things such as homicide, morality, and cooperation. Social psychologists were making inroads into the study of the brain processes that guide social behavior. Specific areas of interest to us—the self, judgment and decision making, emotion, relationships, and well-being—had emerged as well-defined areas of investigation that were producing important insights about human behavior. The lure of writing a textbook, and the challenge involved in doing so, was to capture all of these new developments and integrate them with the timeless classics of social psychology that make it such a captivating discipline.

It’ s a bit shocking to us to think that this is the sixth edition of the text; it seems like just yesterday when we first got together in Berkeley, California, to map out what an informative survey of social psychology might look like. Our work on all six editions has been deeply rewarding. Our fascination with the field, and our pride in being a part of it, has been rekindled and magnified with each edition. It is gratifying to have this book reach the minds of the next generation of social psychology students.

Whether students end up as teachers, health care providers, data scientists, or lawyers, or as talent agents, software designers, climate researchers, or book editors, other people are going to be the center of their lives. All of us grow up dependent on the members of our nuclear family (and, in many cultural contexts, a larger extended family); we go through adolescence obsessed with our social standing and intensely focused on our prospects for romance and sexuality; and as adults we seek out others in the workplace, at clubs, in places of worship, and in our recreational activities. Social psychologists spend their professional lives studying this intense sociality, examining how we act, think, and feel in all of these social encounters—and *why* we act, think, and feel that way. Above all, we want our book to capture the fundamentally social nature of human life and to present the clever, informative, and sometimes inspiring methods that social psychologists have used to study and understand the social life around us.

In our classroom teaching, we have found that many great studies in social psychology are simple narratives: the narrative of the person who felt compelled to harm another person in the name of science, the narrative of the clergyman who did not help someone in need because he was in a hurry, the narrative of the Southerner whose blood pressure rose when he was insulted in a hallway, the narrative of the young researcher who lived among hunter-gatherers in New Guinea to discover universal facial expressions. In our experience, teaching social psychology brings forth so many “Aha!” moments because of these stories that reveal deep and timeless truths about human life.

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY, THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD, AND CRITICAL THINKING

These narratives are different, however, from others that try to capture something important about the human condition: the story of the tortoise and the hare, the tale of the boy who cried wolf, and the anecdote of the child down the street who “took candy from a stranger” and paid a high price for doing so. The tales we tell in this book are all grounded in empirical evidence. It’s the *scientific* foundation of their claims that distinguish social psychologists from other astute observers of the human condition, such as novelists, playwrights, film directors, and parents, teachers, clergymen, and coaches. The methods of social psychology are every bit as important as the insights they reveal.

Indeed, we believe that social psychology is unmatched as a means of teaching critical thinking. Accordingly, our text makes explicit the power of social psychology’s methods and habits of thought for understanding the world and assessing the likely truth of what friends and the media tell us. To make sure students hone their critical thinking skills, we approach the subject matter of social psychology—and the *study* of social psychology—in several ways.

First, in Chapter 2, “The Methods of Social Psychology,” we present an overview of the most important elements of conducting research. We tie the methods of social psychology together by showing how many of them can be applied to a single problem: the nature of the “culture of honor.” That chapter, and much of the rest of the book, is oriented toward providing the critical thinking skills that are the hallmark of social psychology. We show how the tools of social psychology can be used to critique research in the behavioral and medical sciences that students encounter online and in magazines and newspapers. More important, we show how the methods of social psychology can be used to understand everyday life and to figure out how to navigate new situations.

Second, our Not So Fast feature in nearly every chapter highlights how easy it is to be fooled by the evidence we encounter in our lives and to draw conclusions that seem solid but in fact don’t stand up to scientific scrutiny. They show how even the smartest among us can be misled by what we experience and what we read or hear unless we’ve learned some fundamental principles of the scientific method. Many of these lessons are reinforced at the end of each chapter with a set of open-ended Think About It questions that challenge students to think critically in the context of a research-related or real-life scenario.

Third, we embed discussions of methodological issues throughout the book in the context of many programs of research. This melds the content of social psychology with the principles that underlie research that can be used to understand ordinary events in people’s lives.

Fourth, nearly every chapter contains a full-page infographic that examines a social psychological topic of contemporary interest. These infographics give students an inside view of experimentation in social psychology and help them understand how to read data graphics and distill the takeaway points of research. We've tried to make sure that all our field's varied methods—such as archival analyses, randomized controlled experiments, neuroimaging studies, and participant observation—are represented and that the infographics shed light on important trends and questions in everyday life.

Much of the subject matter of social psychology—relationships, media, conformity, prejudice—readily engages the student's attention and imagination. The material sells itself. But in most social psychology textbooks, the presentation often comes across as a list of unconnected topics—as one intriguing fact after another. As a result, students often come away thinking of social psychology as all fun and games. That's fine up to a point. Social psychology *is* fun. But it is much more than that, and we have tried to show how the highlights of our field—the classic findings and the exciting new developments—are part of a scientific study of human nature that can sit with pride next to biology, chemistry, and physics and that is worthy of the most serious-minded student's attention.

THE APPLICATION OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY TO EVERYDAY LIFE

Possibly the easiest part of writing a social psychology textbook is pointing out the enormous applied implications of what the field has to offer. We do a great deal of this throughout the text. Each chapter begins with real-world events that drive home the themes and wisdom of social psychology. For example, Chapter 3, "The Social Self," begins with the story of Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta, whom you and the world know as Lady Gaga. Chapter 5, “Emotion,” begins with the story of how Pixar relied on the science of emotion to create the highly regarded film *Inside Out*. Chapter 12, “Groups,” begins with the harrowing story of how Pelican Bay inmate Todd Ashker united different gangs in prison to lead a protest against solitary confinement. What better way for the student to ponder the findings of social psychology than by seeing how they help us to understand current events? Interspersed throughout the text are Focus On boxes that profile real-world applications of the wisdom of social psychology—for example, in understanding how meditation can shift a person’s brain chemistry or how black uniforms make professional athletes more aggressive.

To bring into sharper focus the relevance of social psychology to daily living, we have three applied mini-chapters, or modules, at the end of the book. These modules bring science-based insight to bear on three areas of great importance to just about everyone: the latest findings on health and how science-based, practical techniques can help us cope with stress during difficult times; the latest discoveries in the study of human intelligence and education; and a review of social psychological insights into how the legal system functions and how it can be improved. These modules constitute dramatic evidence of the relevance of social psychological findings to advancing human welfare.

In this new edition, we have also taken great care to apply the lessons of social psychology to one of the most unexpected and traumatic events in our lives—the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the book we consider how specific insights from social psychology, such as our need to be with other people, shed light on the extraordinary unfolding of the COVID-19 pandemic.

NEW CONTENT IN THE SIXTH EDITION

The cumulative nature of science requires that revisions do justice to the latest discoveries and evolving views of the field. This new edition has much to offer in this regard.

Chapter	**Changes in the Sixth Edition**
1. An Invitation to Social Psychology	We begin our introduction to the scientific study of psychology by situating it in the context of the event that altered social life nearly everywhere—the COVID-19 pandemic. We also discuss the importance of studying reactions to the pandemic, and everything else, in non-WEIRD populations.
2. The Methods of Social Psychology	In sync with changes made to our opening chapter, we also situate our discussion of different methods in the context of virus-related clinical trials. We have also extensively updated our discussion of the issue that continues to command so much of the field’s attention and generate so much commentary, the replication of research findings.

Chapter	Changes in the Sixth Edition
3. The Social Self	We have substantially added to our coverage of theory and research on how the self influences and is influenced by the use of social media, such as work on self-presentation online. We continue to cover classic and recent research that reveals how shifts in construals and perspectives can play a critical role in effective self-regulation.
4. Social Cognition: Thinking About People and Situations	In one of the most substantial changes in this edition, we have taken the material from Chapter 5 of the previous edition (on “explaining behavior”) and integrated it into the material on social cognition more generally. Together, this material presents our text’s most direct and deepest treatment of the importance of construal in human behavior.
5. Emotion and Well-Being	We have added new material on the important literature on emotion regulation, how we express emotions—often to our detriment—online, and deepened our treatment of how emotions figure in well-being, with expanded coverage of emotions like awe and gratitude.

Chapter	Changes in the Sixth Edition
6. Attitudes, Behavior, and Rationalization	We continue to cover key findings and theories on the relationship between attitudes and behavior, honing our discussion of cognitive dissonance theory and the principles that determine whether and how people reduce dissonance. We also include updates to theories such as terror management theory.
7. Persuasion	We continue to cover classic and recent social psychological approaches to persuasion, as well as recent findings on barriers to persuasion. New topics include the moralization of attitudes, persuasion and the climate crisis, and the role of social media in persuasion, particularly the impact of fake news (and claims of fake news) and other forms of misinformation.
8. Social Influence	We discuss new research testifying to the power of norms, including their influence on what popular music takes off and becomes familiar to broad swaths of the public, and how norms influence whether or not someone attains financial security.

Chapter	Changes in the Sixth Edition
9. Relationships and Attraction	In the domain of relationships, we continue to cover both classic and more contemporary approaches to understanding different types of relationships and a range of relationship processes, including commitment, self-concept change, and conflict. For the topic of attraction, we have covered the latest thinking about mere exposure and proximity.
10. Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Discrimination	We continue to cover longstanding as well as newer perspectives on the roots of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination, but have incorporated more contemporary examples of stereotyping and prejudice (e.g., AAPI hate) throughout. We have also expanded our coverage of prejudice reduction, adding a section on diversity ideologies and diversity training.

Chapter	Changes in the Sixth Edition
11. Living in a Prejudiced World	This is an entirely new chapter and, hence, the biggest change from the previous edition. In it, we greatly expand our coverage of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination by going beyond Chapter 10's focus on the causes of intergroup tensions (and possible solutions), to an exploration of the everyday psychology of living in a prejudiced world marked by notable inequities and conflicts. In every chapter, space constraints have prevented us from covering some research that we'd dearly like to tell students about, and nowhere has that constraint been felt more deeply than with our coverage of research on stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. This new chapter greatly weakens that constraint and allows us to cover some older material we long wanted to discuss and new material that addresses this ever-evolving topic of great contemporary relevance.

Chapter	Changes in the Sixth Edition
12. Groups	To our chapter covering the timeless study of groups we have added material on new approaches to collective intelligence and what makes for stronger collective decisions, new thinking about power (related to two strategies by which people gain power), new work on the benefits of diversity in the workplace, and more work on social class.
13. Aggression	We begin Chapter 13 with a new story about the murder of George Floyd and the protests that ensued. We integrate the content of the chapter with reference to the General Aggression Model, and deepen our coverage of themes like the benefits of green spaces and influences of playing violent videogames.
14. Morality, Altruism and Cooperation	We start Chapter 14 with a new story—about the altruism that arose during the pandemic. We have moved our coverage of morality, and deepened the treatment of that material, to this chapter. We have also covered new discoveries on religion and altruism and the cultural conditions that promote cooperation.

In making these changes, we have preserved the approach in the previous editions that each chapter can stand alone and that chapters can be read in any order. We have done so stylistically by writing chapters that are complete narratives in their own right. Our chapters stand on their own theoretically as well, being organized around social psychology’s emphasis on situationism, construal, and automaticity and highlighting important issues addressing what is universal about human behavior and what is variable across cultures. Although our table of contents suggests a particular order of covering the material, instructors will find it easy to present the topics in whatever order best suits their own preferences or needs.

ABOUT THE NEW NORTON ILLUMINE EBOOK FOR *SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY*, 6e

Supporting students and instructors by bringing learning to light.

We are thrilled that the 6th edition of *Social Psychology* is available as a new Norton Illumine Ebook. Designed to support the success of all students, the Norton Illumine Ebook contains active learning features that explore important and challenging concepts, support scientific thinking, and build data literacy skills.

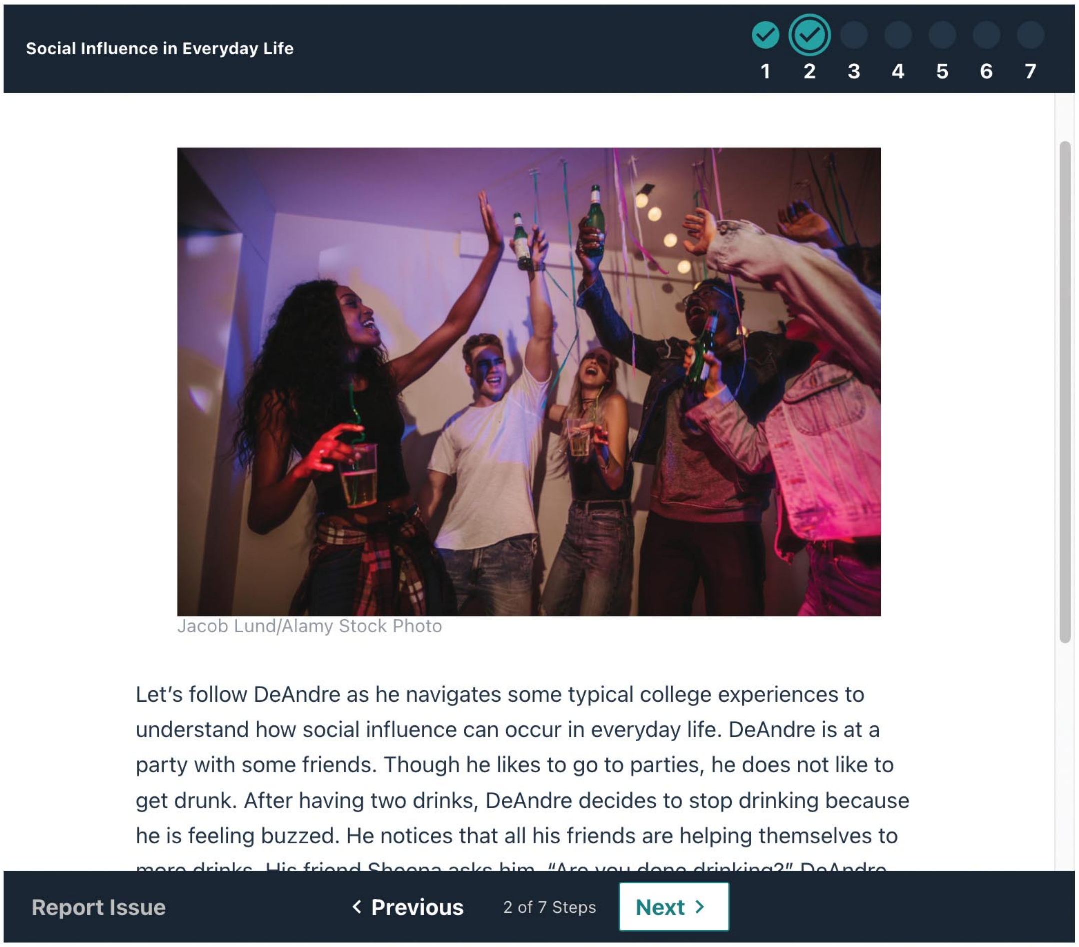
Norton’s high-quality content shines brighter through engaging and motivational features that illuminate core concepts for students in a supportive, low-stakes environment. A reading experience that promotes student accountability and improves preparation is easy to assign through LMS integration.

THE NORTON ILLUMINE EBOOK

- **Engages** students through embedded Critical Concept interactives, Data Explorations, and dynamic data figures that allow students to explore concepts and build skills by reviewing research, analyzing scientific data, and applying concepts to themselves and the world around them.
- **Motivates** students and builds confidence in their learning through low-stakes, end-of-section Check Your

Understanding questions with rich feedback explaining why answers are correct or incorrect.

- Encourages **accountability** and fosters a commitment to learning and practice through easy-to-use assignment tools and LMS integration. Students' progress is tracked as they work toward completion, fostering metacognitive thinking and offering encouragement to keep learning.



Social Influence in Everyday Life

Jacob Lund/Alamy Stock Photo

Let's follow DeAndre as he navigates some typical college experiences to understand how social influence can occur in everyday life. DeAndre is at a party with some friends. Though he likes to go to parties, he does not like to get drunk. After having two drinks, DeAndre decides to stop drinking because he is feeling buzzed. He notices that all his friends are helping themselves to

Critical Concept interactives address the most challenging concepts in the course in a custom interactive experience.

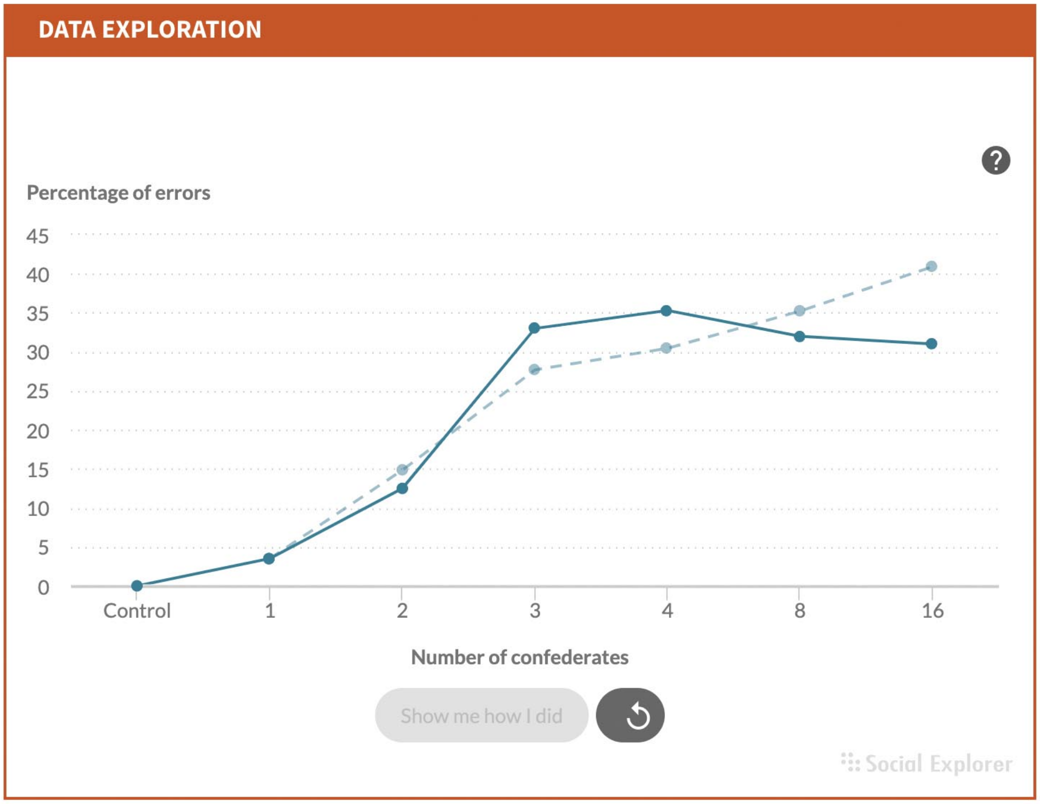


FIGURE 8.4

THE EFFECT OF GROUP SIZE ON CONFORMITY

As the number of people in a majority increases, so does the tendency to conform, but only up to a unanimous majority of three or four. After that, conformity levels off.

Source: Adapted from Asch, 1951.

Data Explorations showcase the empirical process that drives the discipline and help students build data literacy skills.

RESOURCES FOR INSTRUCTORS AND STUDENTS

INQUIZITIVE

Jeong Min Lee, *Georgia State University*.

Created by a cognitive psychologist, InQuizitive adaptive assessment is built on evidence-based principles of learning. Game-like elements and a variety of question types with embedded interactives and dynamic data figures maximize engagement. Personalized question sets target students' individual areas for improvement, and formative answer-specific feedback helps them understand core concepts. A robust activity report makes it easy for instructors to identify challenging concepts and discover students who need more support, and the convenience of LMS integration saves instructors time by allowing InQuizitive scores to report directly to the LMS grade book.

TESTMAKER TEST BANK

Natalie Dove, *Eastern Michigan University*. Amy Corbett, *SUNY Cobleskill*.

Now expanded by 25%, the *Social Psychology* test bank in Norton Testmaker makes it easy to build customized, outcome-driven assessments online. Search and filter test bank questions by chapter, difficulty level, learning objective, and more. Easily export your tests and quizzes to Microsoft Word or Common Cartridge files for your learning management system. Ready-to-use chapter quizzes, including Think About

It, Not So Fast, and Chapter Review quizzes, provide options for low-stakes summative assessment.

ANALYZE THE CLAIM WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Kat Klement, *Bemidji State University*.

Analyze the Claim writing assignments for each chapter, available in Resources for Your LMS and Norton Teaching Tools, ask students to analyze scientific claims made in the popular media using a consistent critical thinking framework. Instructions designed according to principles of transparency in teaching and learning make clear to students the goals for the assignment and criteria for success. An accompanying rubric makes grading critical thinking and exposition skills simple. Instructors can assign points for each rubric criterion automatically in their LMS, for easier scoring.

NORTON TEACHING TOOLS

Jennifer Chmielewski, *CUNY Graduate Center*.

The Norton Teaching Tools site is your first stop when looking for creative resources to design or refresh your course with active and applied learning, in the classroom or online. Norton Teaching Tools for *Social Psychology* include class activity and discussion ideas, video clips, lecture PowerPoints, and more.

RESOURCES FOR YOUR LMS

You can easily add high-quality Norton digital resources to your online, hybrid, or lecture courses. All graded activities—including the Norton Illumine Ebook, InQuizitive, and the Analyze the Claim writing assignments—can be accessed right within your existing learning management system and configured to report to the LMS course grade book.

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CHAPTER
1

An Invitation to Social Psychology

What kinds of people were most likely to get COVID-19 vaccinations?

How do we respond so quickly to fearful situations?

Why are we quicker to blame a person’s behavior on dispositions than to situational influences?

OUTLINE

- Characterizing Social Psychology
- The Power of the Situation
- The Role of Construal
- Automatic Versus Controlled Processing
- Evolution and Human Behavior: How We Are the Same
- Culture and Human Behavior: How We Are Different
- The Uses of Social Psychology

IN JANUARY OF 2020, AMERICANS received the first news of an ominous health threat. A highly contagious virus, SARS-CoV-2, spread quickly around the world, giving rise to the respiratory illness COVID-19 and creating a pandemic that had claimed, by the summer of 2022, more than one million lives in the United States alone and more than six million worldwide.

Experts on infectious diseases quickly realized that halting the spread of the virus and saving lives would require much more than medical intervention. Getting people to take the steps necessary to deal effectively with the pandemic would require the application of what is known about how the human mind works and how social groups function. It would require the application of social psychology.

Early on, when little was known about the virus, people were encouraged to wear masks, to refrain from going out in public as much as possible, to wash their hands frequently, and to scrub everything they had gotten from the grocery store. Being recommendations rather than mandates, these guidelines required people to engage in risk-reward calculations that involved trade-offs between the costs of various actions such as wearing a mask (“Sure, it’s no problem to wear it while I duck into the grocery store, but having it on all day long at work is tiresome.”) and the likely benefits of doing so (not contracting the virus and not spreading it to others). As you will see in Chapters 4, 7, and 8, these calculations are sometimes very deliberate and rational but more often are based on quick, intuitive assessments, such as “What is everyone else doing?” or “I’m healthy; the virus isn’t going to harm *me*.”

Such thoughts raise the question of whose costs and benefits are included in these calculations. Early on in the pandemic, when public health officials were obsessed with “flattening the curve,” the problem to be solved was not just how to minimize the number of deaths from the virus but how to prevent hospitals from being so overrun with COVID patients that they couldn’t deal with any other problems. Public health officials wanted to make sure that cousin Gabriela would still get her cancer treatment, Uncle Jamal could still have bypass surgery, and the young man down the street would get the prompt attention his gunshot wound demanded. Some people more naturally include others in their cost-benefit calculations. As you’ll see throughout this book, people from different parts of the world, different social classes, different ethnicities, and different political ideologies differ in the degree to which they think in individual versus collective terms. As a result, anyone trying to get the public to do what’s necessary to control the pandemic would be wise to “know their audience” and tailor their efforts with these differences in mind.

SCREENING ONLY
7BNT539

#NYCVaccineForAll

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND PUBLIC HEALTH CRISES Why do some people oppose mask wearing and refuse to be vaccinated against COVID-19? Were celebrities such as Lin-Manuel Miranda effective in persuading people to be vaccinated?

> Social psychological research sheds light on these and other questions related to the most pressing issues of our times.

Almost exactly one year after epidemiologists began to worry about the possibility of a worldwide pandemic, Sandra Lindsay, a nurse in New York City, became the first American who was part of a clinical trial to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. The availability of effective vaccines gave a weary public hope that the virus would soon be eradicated or contained and that they could go back to their prepandemic lives. The manufacture and distribution of enough vaccines to deal with the virus worldwide would be a challenge, to be sure, but people could nonetheless see the light at the end of tunnel.

But human nature quickly changed these expectations. Many people refused to get vaccinated, resulting in the continued spread of the virus and the evolution of more contagious variants. Some refused the vaccine because they became convinced, aided by the spread of false information on the internet, that the risk of harm from getting the vaccine was greater than that of contracting the virus. Others fell prey to various conspiracy theories, including that the pandemic was a hoax perpetrated by “Big Pharma” in order to reap the financial rewards of vaccinating nearly the entire human population or that it was a means by which Bill Gates would be able to insert a microchip in everyone who got vaccinated. Many conspiracy theories can sound more than a little bizarre to those who don’t believe them, but the fact that they have appeal says something about human nature. You will encounter several of the psychological building blocks of conspiracy theories, and of effective tools of persuasion, in Chapters 4, 7, and 8.

As fate would have it, some individuals who adhered to these conspiracy theories, and some who refused to get vaccinated for other reasons, contracted COVID. Many became so sick they had to be hospitalized. Did they change their beliefs about vaccination as a result? Not necessarily. In fact, it was not uncommon for such people to deny that they had COVID, insisting to medical staff that they had influenza or pneumonia. Beliefs that are contradicted by strong counterevidence are known to produce what social psychologists call *cognitive dissonance*, a phenomenon you will read about at length in Chapter 6. When people take an action because of a given belief, encountering evidence that runs counter to that belief produces psychological distress. The distress can be reduced by doubling down on the belief—becoming more certain that it was correct and making the person more resistant to efforts on the part of others to change the belief in question. This increased certainty justifies the prior unwillingness to take action to avoid the illness.

To social psychologists, one of the most remarkable developments during the pandemic was the extent to which people’s reactions to it became attached to political orientation. In the United States, liberals and Democrats were more likely to follow public health recommendations, and conservatives and Republicans were more likely to resist them. This is surprising in many ways because, as you’ll read in Chapter 10, groups (like the population of a country) tend to become more unified when facing a common threat. The virus is just such a threat, but unity has been hard to find—even though the response to a virus or a vaccine would not seem to be politically freighted.

Beyond politics, there have been other marked group differences in compliance with public health instructions. People living in some geographical regions of the United States and around the world were much more likely to comply than residents of other regions. And among rich countries, COVID rates were as much as ten times higher in some countries than in others. Some of these geography-related differences are associated with what is called the *tightness* or *looseness* of cultures. In some societies, the prevailing norms are very explicit and powerful, and people are very inclined to follow them. Social psychologists consider these societies “tight.” In other, “loose” societies, the norms are weaker, and compliance is less certain. Social psychologists have identified which countries are tight, which are loose, and why they have come to differ on this dimension.

As we hope you’ll see from reading this book, dealing effectively with nearly all of the most pressing problems facing the world today—including climate change, growing income inequality, the rise of ethnocentrism and ethnonationalism, and the transformation of work and its implications for human identity—requires an understanding of social psychology. ■

Characterizing Social Psychology

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- Give examples of the kinds of things social psychologists study.

People have always sought explanations for human behavior. Stories in the form of myths, legends, parables, and folk wisdom have been passed from one generation to the next to explain why people do what they do and to communicate what is acceptable and what is not. Social psychologists go beyond folk wisdom and try to establish a scientific basis for understanding human behavior. Social psychology can be defined as the scientific study of the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals in social situations.

Why do people stereotype others? Why do people risk their lives to help others? Why do some marriages flourish and others fail? How do orderly crowds turn into violent mobs? What aspects of our neighborhood may lead us to live long lives or die young? These sorts of questions lie at the heart of social psychology. In this book, you'll read about careful research that has provided at least partial answers to such questions. Some of the answers probably won't surprise you. For example, we tend to like people who like us, and the people we like generally have attitudes and interests that are similar to ours. When findings reflect our intuitions and folk wisdom, social psychologists go further, seeking to discover what explains the phenomenon in question.

In contrast, other answers have been so counterintuitive that they surprised even the social psychologists who conducted the research. As you will see throughout this book, many of our most strongly held folk theories or intuitions fail to give complete answers to enduring questions about our lives, and others are just plain wrong. Social psychologists test these intuitions by devising studies and crafting experiments that reveal the causes of behavior in social situations.

> “The test of learning psychology is whether your understanding of situations you encounter has changed, not whether you have learned a new fact.”
>
> —NOBEL PRIZE—WINNING PSYCHOLOGIST DANIEL KAHNEMAN

Social psychologists study situations in which people influence one another as well as the ways people respond to attempts to influence them. Social psychologists are also interested in how people make sense of their world—how they decide what and whom to believe; how they understand the motives, personalities, and abilities of other people; and how they explain the events occurring around them. Social psychologists apply their knowledge to important questions: how to reduce stereotyping and prejudice in the classroom and workplace; how to combat the spread of disinformation on the internet; how to make eyewitness testimony more reliable; how physicians can best use diverse sources of information to make a correct diagnosis; what goes wrong in airplane cockpits when there is an accident or near accident; and how businesses, governments, and individuals can make better decisions.

We hope that in reading this book, you will arrive at a greater understanding of yourself and others. You will gain insights that you can apply in your education, your career, and your relationships. We hope that your reasoning and the quality of your life will improve accordingly.

Glossary

social psychology	The scientific study of the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals in social situations.

The Power of the Situation

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- Assess the importance of the social situation versus individual characteristics, such as personality traits, for determining how we behave.

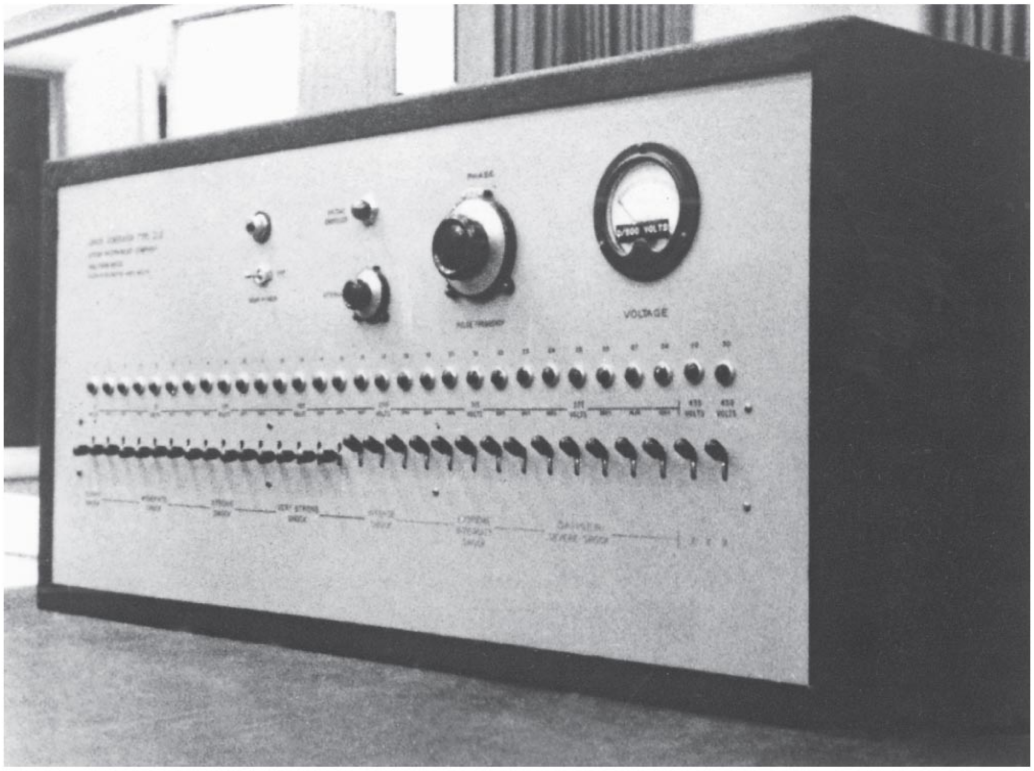
The modern history of social psychology begins with Kurt Lewin, a Jewish Berliner who fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s and became a professor at the University of Iowa and then MIT. Lewin studied physics and applied a powerful idea of that discipline to an understanding of human social life. He believed that the behavior of people, like the behavior of objects, is always a function of the field of forces surrounding them (Lewin, 1935). To understand how fast a solid object will travel through a medium, for example, we must know such things as the viscosity of the medium, the force of gravity, and the strength of any initial force applied to the object. In the case of people, the forces are psychological as well as physical.

KURT LEWIN Lewin is generally considered the founder of modern social psychology. He emphasized the importance of situational factors external to the individual and showed that social psychologists could make use of experiments.

The field of forces in the case of human behavior is the situation, especially the social situation. A person’ s physical and psychological traits are also important determinants of behavior, but these attributes always interact with the situation to produce the resulting behavior. The main situational influences on our behavior are the actions, words, and emotions of other people. Friends and adversaries, romantic partners, bosses, and even total strangers can cause us to be kinder or meaner, lazier or more hardworking, bolder or more cautious. People in our environment can produce drastic changes in our beliefs and behavior not only by telling us what to think or do but also by subtly implying through their actions that our acceptability as a friend or group member depends on adopting their views or behaving as they do. To understand why we act as we do, then, we need to think about the power of the situation—a central focus of studies in social psychology.

The Milgram Experiment

Lewin’ s thinking about the power of the situation shaped early studies in social psychology. One of the most striking demonstrations was a classic experiment by psychologist Stanley Milgram (1963, 1974). Milgram advertised in the local newspaper for men willing to participate in a study on learning and memory at Yale University in exchange for a modest amount of money. (In subsequent experiments, women also participated; the results were similar.) When the volunteers—a mix of people from different class backgrounds ranging in age from their 20s to their 50s—arrived at the laboratory, a man in a white lab coat told them they would be participating in a study about the effects of punishment on learning. There would be a “teacher” and a “learner,” and the learner would try to memorize word pairs such as *wild/duck*. Each volunteer and another man, a pleasant-looking man in his late 40s, drew slips of paper to determine who would play which role. But things were not as they seemed: The pleasant-looking man was actually an accomplice of the experimenter, and the drawing was rigged so that he was always the learner.


PHASE
0/500 VOLTS
VOLTAGE

(A)

(B)

THE MILGRAM EXPERIMENT To examine the role of social influence, Stanley Milgram set up a study in which participants believed they were testing a learner (actually a confederate) and punishing him with shocks when he gave wrong answers. (A) Milgram’s “shock machine.” (B) The participant and experimenter attaching electrodes to the “learner” before testing begins.

The participant, now in the role of “teacher,” was then instructed to administer shocks—from 15 to 450 volts—to the “learner” each time the learner made an error. Labels under the shock switches ranged from “slight shock” through “danger: severe shock” to “XXX.” The experimenter explained that the teacher was to administer shocks in ascending 15-volt magnitudes: 15 volts the first time the learner made an error, 30 volts the next time, and so on. The teacher was given a 45-volt shock to get a sense of how painful the shocks would be. What he didn’t know was that the learner, who was in another room, was not actually being shocked.

Most participants became concerned as they administered increasingly intense shocks and turned to the experimenter to ask what should be done, but the experimenter insisted they go on. The first time a teacher expressed reservations, he was told, “Please continue.” If the teacher balked, the experimenter said, “The experiment requires that you continue.” If the teacher continued to hesitate, the experimenter said, “It’s absolutely essential that you continue.” If necessary, the experimenter escalated to, “You have no other choice. You must go on.” If the participant asked whether the learner could suffer permanent physical injury, the experimenter said, “Although the shocks may be painful, there is no permanent tissue damage, so please go on.”

In the end, despite the learner’s groans, pleas, screams, and eventual silence as the intensity of the shocks increased, 80 percent of the participants continued past the 150-volt level—at which point the learner mentioned that he had a heart condition and screamed, “Let me out of here!” Fully 62.5 percent of the participants went all the way to the 450-volt level, delivering everything the shock generator could produce. The average amount of shock given was 360 volts, *after* the learner let out an agonized scream and became hysterical.

> “Evil is obvious only in retrospect.”
>
> –GLORIA STEINEM

This finding surprised Milgram and other experts. A panel of 39 psychiatrists predicted that only 20 percent of the participants would continue past the 150-volt level and that only 1 percent would continue past the 330-volt level. Milgram’s study and its implications are described in more detail in Chapter 9. For now, the important question is: What was it about this situation that led participants to continue applying shocks to a person in obvious pain, possibly causing serious harm? Milgram’s participants were not heartless fiends. Instead, the situation was extraordinarily effective in leading them to do something that would normally fill them with horror. The experiment was presented as a scientific investigation—an unfamiliar situation for most participants. The experimenter explicitly took responsibility for what happened. (Adolf Hitler frequently made similar pledges during the years he marched his nation into a world war and the Holocaust.) Moreover, participants could not have guessed at the outset what the experiment involved, so they were not prepared to resist anyone’s demands. And as Milgram stressed, the step-by-step nature of the procedure was crucial. If the participant didn’t quit at 225 volts, then why quit at 255? If not at 420, then why at 435?

Seminarians as Samaritans

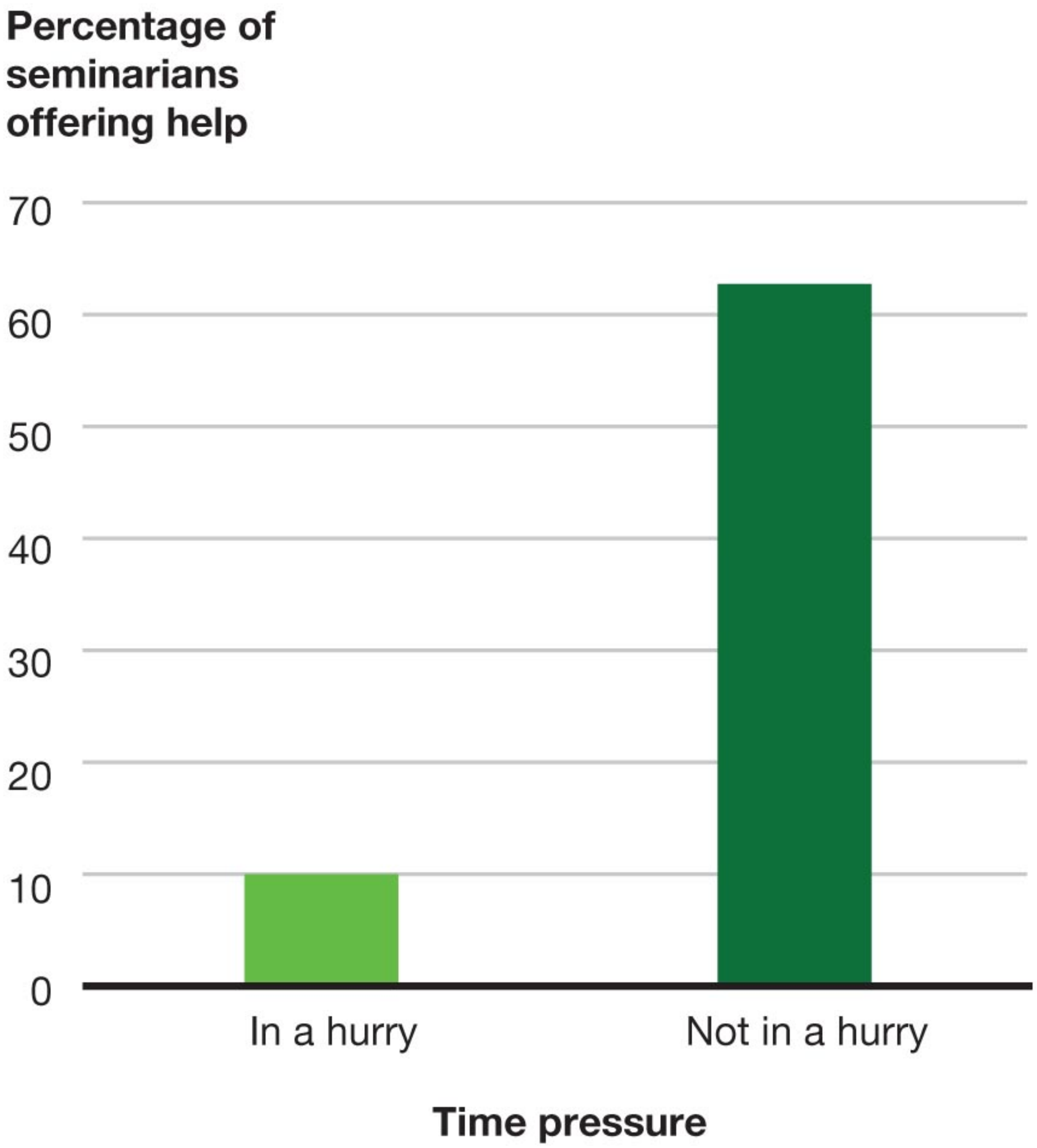


FIGURE 1.1 **THE POWER OF THE SITUATION AND HELPING** Princeton seminarians usually helped a “victim” if they were not in a hurry, but they rarely helped if they were in a rush. Source: Darley & Batson, 1973.

Some ten years after Milgram’s study, a classic experiment by John Darley and Daniel Batson (1973) demonstrated Lewin’s idea of the power of the situation even more simply. In this study, Princeton Theological Seminary students first discussed their religious orientation, reporting on whether they viewed religion primarily as a means toward personal salvation or as a source of moral and spiritual values. Darley and Batson then asked each young seminarian to go to another building to deliver a short sermon. The seminarians were told what route to follow to get there most easily. Some were told that they had plenty of time to arrive at the location for their lecture, and some were told that they were already late and should hurry. On the way to deliver their sermon—on the topic of the Good Samaritan, by the way—each of the seminarians passed a man who was sitting in a doorway with his head down, coughing and groaning and in apparent need of help.

It turned out that the nature of seminary students' religious orientation was of no use in predicting whether they would offer assistance. But as you can see in **Figure 1.1**, whether seminarians were in a hurry or not was a very powerful predictor. The seminarians were pretty good Samaritans as a group—but only when they weren't in a rush.

The Fundamental Attribution Error

People are thus governed by situational factors—such as whether they are being pressured by someone or whether they are late—more than they tend to believe. At the same time, internal factors—those that have to do with the kind of person someone is—have less influence than most people assume they do. You may be surprised by many of the findings reported in this book because we tend to underestimate the power of external forces and assume, often mistakenly, that the causes of people's behavior can be found mostly within them.

Psychologists call internal factors dispositions—that is, beliefs, values, personality traits, and abilities that guide behavior. People tend to think of dispositions as underlying causes of behavior, but that's not necessarily true. Seeing an acquaintance put a dollar in a donation jar may prompt us to assume that the person is kind, but subsequent observations of the person in different situations might show that we had overgeneralized from a single act. Noticing a stranger in the street behaving angrily, we might assume that the person is aggressive or ill tempered. Such judgments are valid less often than we think.

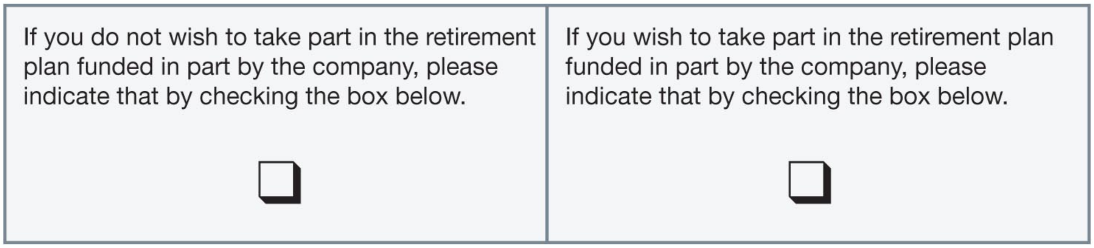
THE FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTION ERROR If you knew that a theology student had come across this person, who was coughing and groaning, and passed the person by without offering to help, what would you think of the student? Would you regard the student as an uncaring person, or would you assume that some situational factor, such as being late for an appointment, caused the student to rush past without stopping to help? If you’re like most people, you would probably jump to an unfavorable conclusion about the student’s personality.

The failure to recognize the importance of situational influences on behavior, together with the tendency to overemphasize dispositions, is known as the fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977). The findings of Milgram’s obedience study, the Good Samaritan study, and many others in social psychology suggest that people should consider situational factors when trying to understand other people’s behavior before assuming that the behavior is the result of dispositions. As you read this book, you will become more attuned to situational factors like social norms, the presence of other people, and whether one is with friends or strangers. The ultimate lesson of social psychology is thus a compassionate one. Social psychology encourages us to look at another person’s situation—to try to understand the complex field of forces acting on the individual—in order to fully understand the person’s behavior.

Nudge, Don’t Push

Seventeen years after writing about situationism, Kurt Lewin (1952) introduced the concept of “channel factors” to help explain why certain circumstances that seem unimportant can have great consequences for behavior, either facilitating it or blocking it. Circumstances can guide behavior in a particular direction by making it easier to follow one path rather than another. The concept of channel factors has been borrowed by behavioral economics, a field at the intersection of social psychology and economics. Behavioral economists refer to these factors as “nudges”—small, innocuous-seeming prompts that can have big effects on behavior.

The nudge concept has been applied in many ways. For example, behavioral economists have encouraged businesses to get as many of their employees as possible to participate in savings plans in which the employer puts money away for the employee’s retirement. Rather than have their employees “opt in” to their retirement programs by checking a box or signing a statement saying they *do* wish to be enrolled, employers create an easy channel for participation by making it automatic. Employees must check a box or sign a statement if they *don’t* want the retirement plan; otherwise, they are automatically enrolled (**Figure 1.2**). This modest nudge creates far more participation (and far happier retirements) than when the nudge works against participation (J. Choi, Laibson, & Madrian, 2009; Madrian & Shea, 2001). And did you know that 99 percent of Austrians are registered organ donors, whereas only 12 percent of Germans are? Before you commit the fundamental attribution error and assume that Austrians are simply more generous than Germans, we hasten to tell you that Germans have to check a box if they do want to register as organ donors; Austrians have to check a box if they don’t wish to register as organ donors.



If you do not wish to take part in the retirement plan funded in part by the company, please indicate that by checking the box below. ☐	If you wish to take part in the retirement plan funded in part by the company, please indicate that by checking the box below. ☐

FIGURE 1.2 **HOW TO HAVE A HAPPY RETIREMENT** If your new employee form asks the question on the left, you are much more likely to be enrolled in the company’s retirement plan than if it asks the question on the right.

> “If you are like most people, then like most people, you don’t know you’re like most people.”
>
> —SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGIST DAN GILBERT

LOOKING BACK

Situations are often more powerful in their influence on behavior than we realize. Whether or not people are kind to others and whether or not they act in their own best interests can depend on subtle aspects of the situation. We often overlook such situational factors when we try to understand our own behavior or that of others, and we often mistakenly attribute behavior to presumed dispositions (the fundamental attribution error).

Glossary

dispositions
Internal factors, such as beliefs, values, personality traits, and abilities, that guide a person’s behavior.

fundamental attribution error
The failure to recognize the importance of situational influences on behavior, along with the corresponding tendency to overemphasize the importance of dispositions on behavior.

The Role of Construal

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe how the cognitive process of construal influences our understanding of reality.
- Explain how schemas determine our understanding of social situations and how to behave in them.

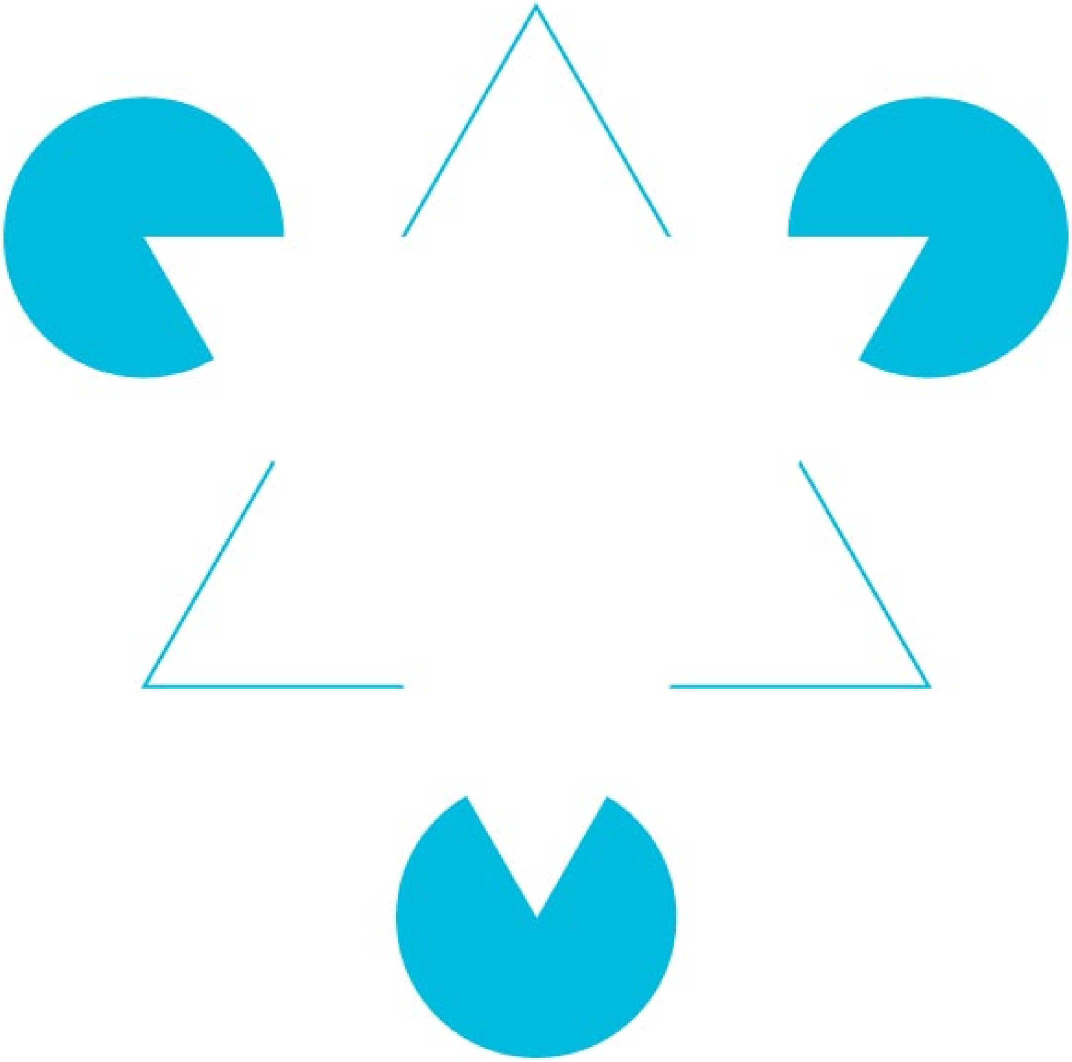


FIGURE 1.3 **GESTALT PRINCIPLES AND PERCEPTION** When viewing this figure, known as the Kanizsa triangle, people fill in the empty spaces in their mind and perceive a white triangle.

Look at **Figure 1.3**. Do you see a white triangle? Most people do, but in fact there is no white triangle. We construct a triangle in our mind out of the *gaps* in the picture. The gaps are located just where they would be if a triangle were laid over the outlined triangle and a portion of each of the three circles. That makes a good, clear image, but it’s entirely a creation of our perceptual apparatus and our assumptions about the visual world. Both the perceptual process and the assumptions are automatic and nonconscious—that is to say, we’re not consciously aware of them. Now look at the picture of the beautiful woman in **Figure 1.4**. Or is it a picture of a witch?

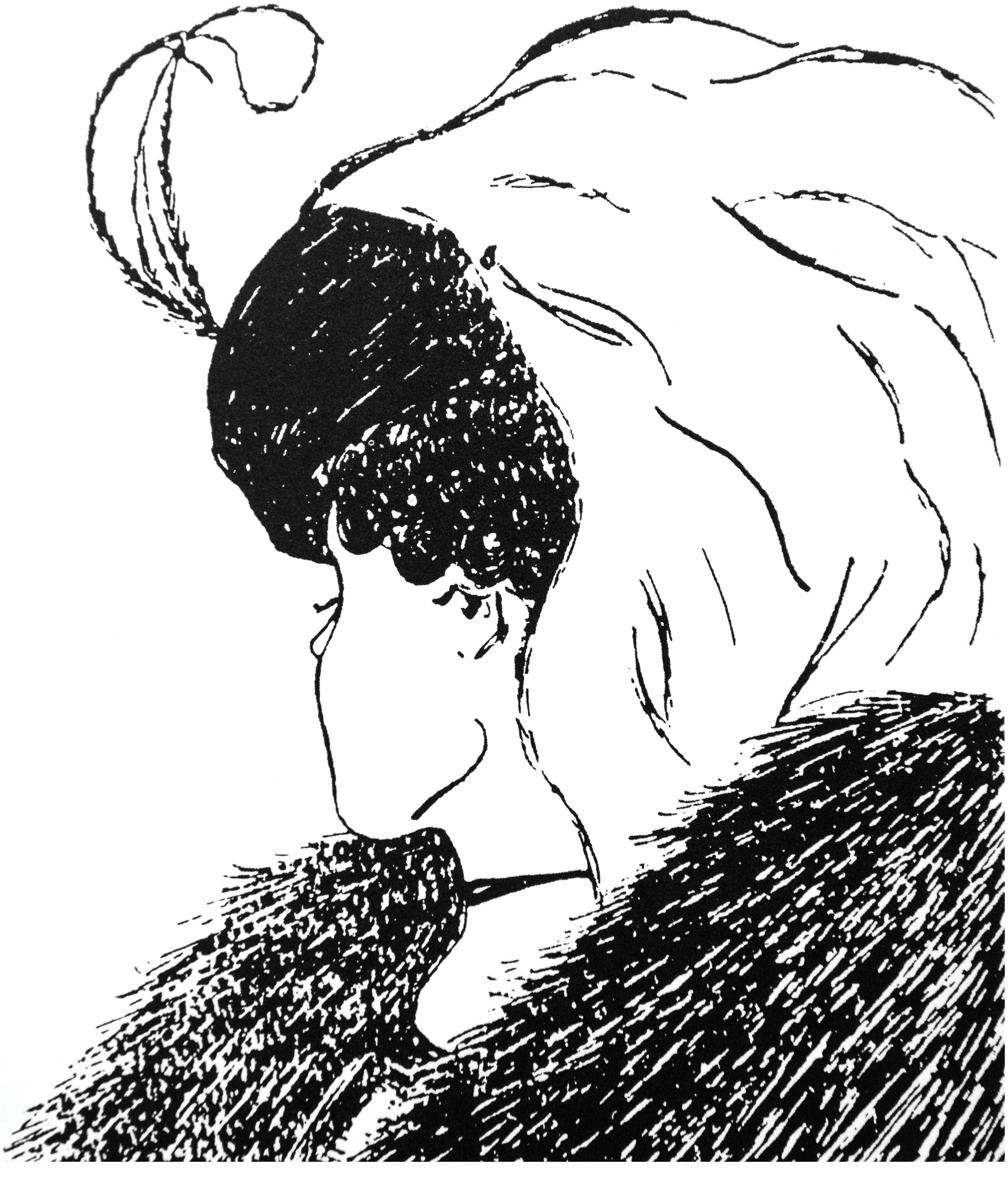


FIGURE 1.4 **GESTALT PRINCIPLES AND UNCONSCIOUS PROCESSING** This picture can be seen as a beautiful woman or as a witch. What we see at first is very much determined by what is in our heads. If we’ve just seen a fashion spread in a

magazine, we're more likely to interpret the picture as a beautiful woman. If we've just seen an ad for a horror movie, we're more likely to see a witch.

> "We don't see things as they are; we see them as we are."
>
> —ANAÏS NIN

Understanding Reality

Our perceptions normally bear a resemblance to what the world is really like. Often, though, our perceptions require substantial interpretation on our part and can be subject to significant bias. What we see is not necessarily what is actually there but what is plausible—what makes a good, predictable "figure" in light of the stored existing representations we have of the world and in light of the context we are in. German psychologists in the early part of the twentieth century convincingly argued for this view in the case of visual perception. The theoretical orientation of those psychologists centered on the concept of *gestalt*, German for "form" or "figure." The basic idea of Gestalt psychology is that people perceive objects not by means of some passive and unbiased perception of objective reality but by active, usually nonconscious interpretation of what the object represents. The belief that we see the world directly, without any complicated perceptual or cognitive machinery "doctoring" the data, is referred to by philosophers and social psychologists as "naive realism" (Pronin, Gilovich, & Ross, 2004; L. Ross & Ward, 1996).

What’s true for visual perception is even truer for judgments about the social world. Our judgments and beliefs are actively constructed from perceptions and thoughts. They are not simple readouts of reality. In the Milgram study described earlier, participants’ understanding of the situation was shaped by subtle features of experimental design that led them to be less aware of the harm they might be causing. A “study participant” who had “chosen” to be in the “experiment” was “learning” a list of words guided by “feedback” given by the real participant in the form of electric shocks. A *participant* is someone who is acting freely; *learning* is a normal activity that often depends on *feedback*, generally an innocuous form of information. All this was taking place in the context of an *experiment*, a benign activity carried out by trustworthy scientists. Participants in the Milgram experiment weren’t simply registering what the situation was; they were interpreting it in ways that the experimenter was encouraging.

Construal refers to how we interpret situations and behavior and how we make inferences, often nonconscious, about the contexts and the people we are encountering. Whether we regard people as free agents or victims, as freedom fighters or terrorists, will affect our perceptions of their actions. And our perceptions drive our behavior toward them.

First umpire: “I call ’em as I see ’em.”

Second umpire: “I call ’em as they are.”

Third umpire: “They ain’t nothin’ till I call ’em.”

Schemas

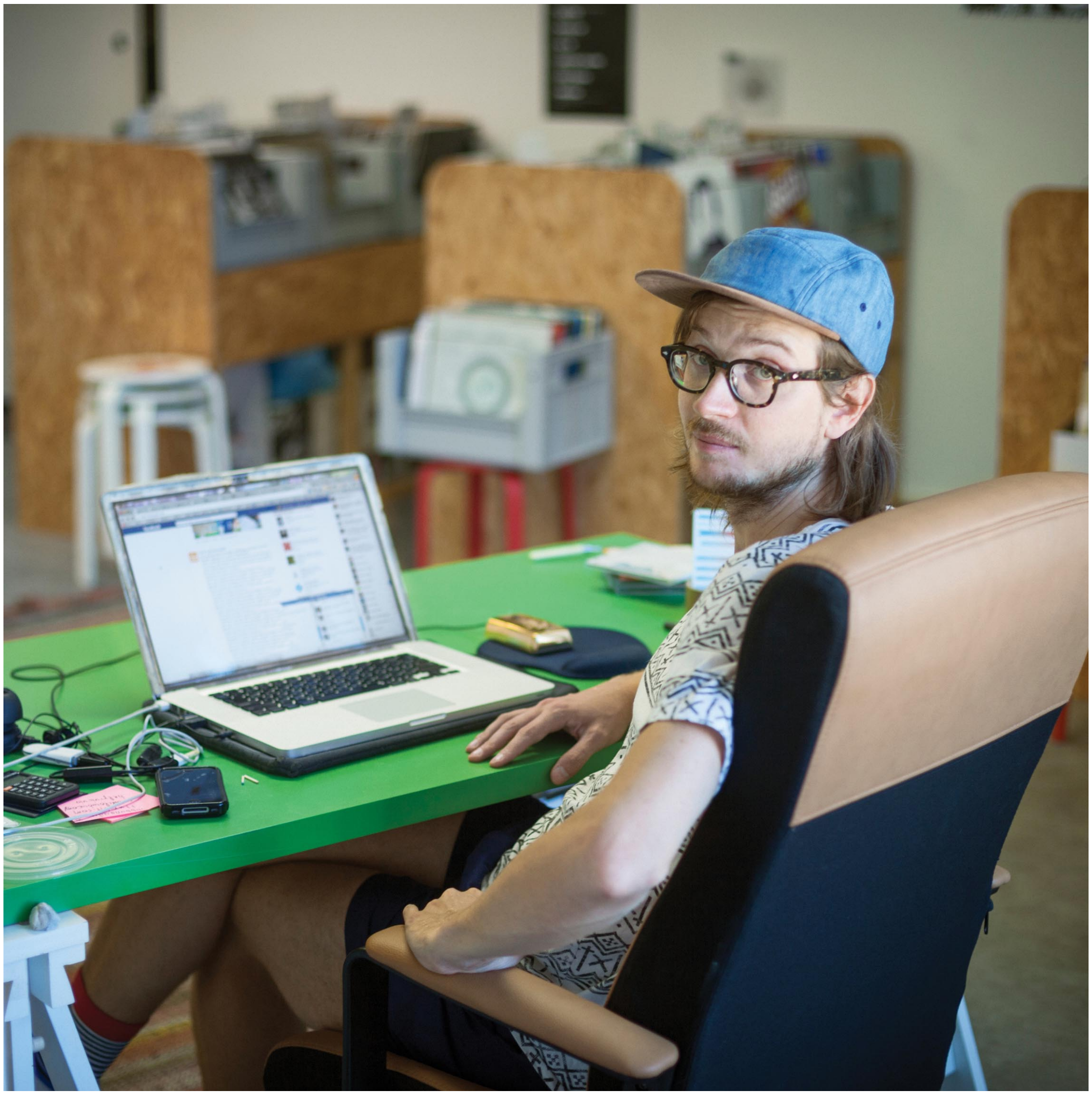
How do we know how to behave in different kinds of situations? For example, suppose you're riding on an uncrowded train and someone asks you to give up your seat. What prompts you to respond in a particular way? Do you refuse, ask for an explanation, pretend not to hear, or promptly surrender the seat? For that matter, how do you know how to behave in even the most ordinary of situations, such as a college seminar?

EAT
TAYLOR'S
Tay

SCHEMAS A fast food restaurant and a fancy restaurant.

Although it seems as though we understand social situations immediately and directly, we actually depend on elaborate stores of systematized knowledge to understand even the simplest and most “obvious” situations. These stores, called schemas, consist of generalized knowledge about the physical and social world, such as what kind of behavior to expect when dealing with a religious leader, a sales clerk, a professor, or a police officer and how to behave in a seminar, at a funeral, at a McDonald’s or a four-star restaurant, or when riding on a crowded or empty subway. There is even a schema—alleged to be universal—for falling in love. Schemas capture the regularities of life and lead us to rely on certain expectations so we don’t have to invent the world anew all the time. Schemas are among the most important and useful tools we use in construing the world.

Stereotypes



STEREOTYPES AND CONSTRUAL Stereotypes are schemas about people of a certain kind. We construe people in light of the stereotypes they call up. Would you be surprised to know that the fellow in this picture is a wealthy lawyer who plays polo and frequents trendy bars in Manhattan? None of these things are true, and you relied on your stereotypes to prevent you from entertaining these possibilities.

Much work in social psychology has been dedicated to the study of stereotypes—schemas that we have for people of various kinds. Research on stereotyping examines the content of these person schemas and how they are applied and sometimes misapplied in order to facilitate—or derail—interactions. We tend to judge individuals based on particular person schemas we have—stereotypes about a person’s nationality, gender, religion, occupation, neighborhood, or sorority. Such summaries may be necessary for us to function efficiently and effectively, but they’re often unfounded. They can be applied in the wrong way and to the wrong people, and they can be given too much weight in relation to more specific information we have about a particular person (or would have if we didn’t assume that the stereotype was all we needed to know). The frequently pernicious role of stereotypes is the subject of two entire chapters of this book (Chapters 10 and 11).

> “Without a profound simplification the world around us would be an infinite, undefined tangle that would defy our ability to orient ourselves and decide upon our actions. . . . We are compelled to reduce the knowable to a schema.”
>
> —NOVELIST PRIMO LEVI

LOOKING BACK

Although our understanding of situations often seems to result from a direct, unmediated registration of meaning, our comprehension of even the simplest physical stimuli is the result of construal processes that make use of well-developed knowledge structures. Such structures are called schemas when they summarize commonly encountered situations, and they are called stereotypes when they describe different types of people.

Glossary

Gestalt psychology

Based on the German word *gestalt*, meaning “form” or “figure,” an approach that stresses the fact that people’s perception of objects involves active, usually nonconscious interpretation of what the object represents as a whole.

construal

One’s interpretation of or inference about the stimuli or situations that one confronts.

schema

A knowledge structure consisting of any organized body of stored information that is used to help in understanding events.

stereotype

A belief that certain attributes are characteristic of members of a particular group.

Automatic Versus Controlled Processing

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- Discuss the role of nonconscious, automatic cognitive processes in our attitudes and understanding of events, including our own behavior.

How would you react if you saw a stranger at an airport coughing and sniffling? In the post-COVID world, you might fear that this person had COVID-19. The mind processes information in two ways when we encounter a social situation. One way is automatic and nonconscious, often based on emotional factors, and the other is conscious, systematic, and more likely to be controlled by deliberative thought. Often, emotional reactions occur before conscious thought takes over. Thus, your fearful reaction to the person might automatically kick in without any special thought on your part. But when you start thinking deliberatively and systematically, you realize that these symptoms are also consistent with a summer cold or allergies and that there's no reason to suspect the person will start a superspreader event on the plane flight.

Automatic and controlled processing can result in quite different attitudes in the same person toward members of outgroups (Devine, 1989a, 1989b; Devine et al., 1991, 2002, 2012). People with low expressed prejudice toward an outgroup may nevertheless reveal feelings toward people in that outgroup that are almost as prejudiced as those of people who explicitly confess to disliking the group. For example, experimenters asked some White participants to read words stereotypically associated with Black Americans (for example, jazz, busing) and then read a brief description of someone whose race was not specified. Those participants were more likely to report that the individual was hostile than were participants who hadn't read such words. And this was true regardless of whether they were willing to express anti-Black attitudes in a questionnaire—in other words, whether they were openly prejudiced or not. The judgments of the "unprejudiced" people were found to be just as prejudiced as those of their explicitly prejudiced counterparts when it came to nonconscious processing of information.

AUTOMATIC PROCESSING People often react quickly to frightening situations so that they can take immediate action to save themselves from danger. The girl is handling the snake under the supervision of her teacher, but an automatic reaction is still visible. If the girl were to come across a snake in the grass, she would probably have a stronger automatic fear reaction.

In general, automatic processes give rise to *implicit* attitudes and beliefs that can't be readily controlled by the conscious mind; controlled, conscious processing results in *explicit* attitudes and beliefs that we're aware of—though these may become implicit or nonconscious over time. It's important to recognize, too, that participants in this experiment weren't necessarily being dishonest when they reported being unprejudiced. They likely were genuinely unaware of the extent of the bias revealed by the implicit measures of attitude.

A variety of social categories, not just race, have considerable impact on judgments and behavior. Other easily discernible personal features, such as gender and age, also tend to trigger stereotypes that a person uses in forming judgments about other people, even when the person is unaware that these social categories have influenced the judgment in question (I. V. Blair, Judd, & Fallman, 2004; Brewer, 1988; Macrae, Stangor, & Milne, 1994).

"If you press me to say why I loved him, I can say no more than because he was he, and I was I."

—FRENCH RENAISSANCE ESSAYIST MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

Types of Nonconscious Processing

Social psychologists have shown that much of our cognitive activity is hidden from us. In solving problems, sometimes we’re well aware of the relevant factors we’re dealing with and the procedures we’re using to work with them. For example, when we solve a math problem (“Take half the base, multiply it by the height and . . .”), we generally know exactly what formula we’re using. But these sorts of cognitive processes—where we are conscious of most of what is going on in our head—are rarer than you might think. Often we can’t correctly explain the reasons for our judgments about other people, our understanding of the causes of physical and social events, or what led us to choose one job applicant over another (or one romantic partner over another, for that matter).

In one experiment making this point about awareness, researchers asked customers in a mall to evaluate the quality of four pairs of nylon stockings laid out in a row on a table (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Customers were four times as likely to give the highest rating to the last pair of stockings they examined as to give it to the first pair of stockings. Yet in response to whether the position of the stockings had influenced their judgments about quality, they were astonished that the questioner could think they might have been influenced by such a trivial, irrelevant factor!

Often we can’t even identify some of the crucial factors that affect our beliefs and behavior. John Bargh and Paula Pietromonaco (1982) presented words on a computer screen for one-tenth of a second. The duration of exposure was so short that participants were unable to distinguish words they had seen from those they hadn’t seen and didn’t even know that words had been flashed at all. Some participants were exposed to words with a hostile meaning and some to neutral words. The participants then read about a man named Donald, whose behavior was ambiguous as to whether it could be construed as hostile. (“A salesman knocked at the door, but Donald refused to let him enter.”) Participants exposed to the hostility-related words rated Donald as being more hostile than did participants exposed to the neutral words. Hundreds of other demonstrations have shown that important judgments and behaviors can be shaped by influences that people are unaware of. (See also Box 1.1 for more examples.)

- When people read a persuasive communication in a room with a fishy smell, they are less likely to be persuaded by it than if there is no distinctive smell present or if there is an unpleasant smell that isn’t fishy. This works, though, only in cultures where dubious propositions are described as “fishy.” (S. W. S. Lee & Schwarz, 2012).
- Asking people to rate the accuracy of a news headline causes them to subsequently share more accurate and valid news on Facebook (Pennycook et al., 2021).
- And here’s something you can try for yourself. Have a conversation with someone in which you deliberately change your body position from time to time. Fold your arms for a couple of minutes. Shift most of your weight to one side. Put one hand in a pocket. Watch what your conversation partner does after each change and try not to giggle when your partner mimics your body language. “Ideomotor mimicry” is something we engage in quite nonconsciously. When people don’t do it, the encounter can become awkward and unsatisfying.

You will read countless examples in this book of various stimuli and situations that exert their effects without our conscious awareness. Indeed, if the effects in a given study were consciously produced, you wouldn’t have to read about them in this book; you would already know about them.

TYPES OF NONCONSCIOUS PROCESSING We subconsciously imitate other people's body language. This is called "ideomotor mimicry."

Functions of Nonconscious Processing

Why does so much mental processing take place outside of our awareness? Partly, it's a matter of efficiency. Conscious processes are generally slow and can run only serially—one step at a time. Automatic processes are typically much faster and can operate in parallel. When we recognize a face as belonging to a fourth-grade classmate, we have done so by processing numerous features (forehead, eyes, chin, coloring, and so on) holistically and in a fraction of a second. Recognizing each feature one step at a time would leave us hopelessly mired in computation. And it's quite handy to be able to drive a car on autopilot while enjoying the scenery or carrying on a conversation. (You may sometimes have been startled to realize that you’ve reached your destination without being completely aware of how you got there.)

BOX 1.1

FOCUS ON EVERYDAY LIFE

Subtle Situational Influence

Words, sights, sounds, and other stimuli can influence how we act, for good or for ill, even when we’re not consciously aware of them. Consider the following findings.

- Want to make your employees more creative? Have them work in a green or blue environment—and be sure they don’t work in a red environment (Lichtenfeld et al., 2012; R. Mehta & Zhu, 2009).
- Green, as in environmental greenery, can help reduce violence. People living in public housing surrounded by greenery commit fewer violent crimes than do people in nearby public housing surrounded by concrete (Kuo & Sullivan, 2001).
- Want to get lots of hits on your dating profile? Wear a red shirt in your profile photo or at least put a red border around your picture. Both men and women are considered sexier when dressed in red or just surrounded by red (Elliot et al., 2010).
- Want taxpayers to support education bond issues? Lobby to make schools the primary voting locations. Want to get voters to outlaw late-term abortion? Lobby to have voters cast their ballots

in churches. The associations people have to the buildings that serve as polling stations influence how they vote (Berger, Meredith, & Wheeler, 2008).

- Want people to pay more consistently for the office coffee they consume by putting the agreed-upon fee in the “honest box”? On the wall near the box, put up a poster of anything with eyes (even a symbolic stick-figure face). A nonconscious sense of being observed makes people more likely to be on their best behavior (Bateson, Nettle, & Roberts, 2006; Haley & Fessler, 2005).
- Want people to feel deeply concerned about the threat posed by climate change? Have them fill out a survey about carbon emissions in an especially hot room. People take the threat of global warming more seriously when they are feeling uncomfortably warm themselves (Risen & Critcher, 2011).

This list might remind you of the stand-up comic who follows a rapid-fire series of one-liners with the statement, “I’ve got a million of these.” And indeed, social psychologists have offered no shortage of demonstrations of the influence of incidental stimuli on people’s behavior. The most obvious implication of this research is that we can influence people’s behavior by changing the details of their surrounding physical environment. A less obvious implication is that if we want to free ourselves of these kinds of influences, we should try to consider important propositions and potential courses of action in a number of different settings, if possible. That way, incidental stimuli associated with the different environments are likely to cancel each other out, resulting in sounder judgments and decisions.

We’re not conscious of many of the stimuli that influence us, and we’re not fully aware of the cognitive processes that guide our judgments and behaviors. A very important implication of nonconscious processing is that research on human behavior should not normally depend on people’s verbal reports about why they believe something or why they engaged in a particular behavior. Instead, social psychologists must craft experiments to isolate the true causes of people’s behavior.

LOOKING BACK

Much of our behavior and many kinds of construal processes occur without our awareness—sometimes without awareness of even the stimuli that we are responding to. We tend to overestimate how accessible our mental processes are to our consciousness.

Evolution and Human Behavior: How We Are the Same

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

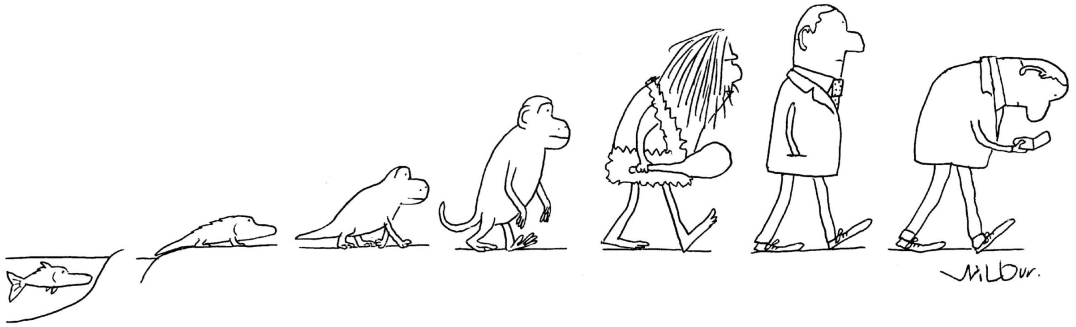
- Explain how evolution has shaped human behavior and culture.
- Identify some of the most important similarities in human behavior across cultures.
- Identify some of the brain structures and processes that underlie our behavior.

Why do human beings generally live in family groups, assign roles to people on the basis of age and gender, enjoy sharing food, adorn their bodies, classify flora and fauna, and have rites of passage and myths? Evolution may explain such behaviors (Conway & Schaller, 2002).

Evolutionary theory has been around for more than 150 years, ever since Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*. In his five-and-a-half-year voyage on the *Beagle*, Darwin discovered how animal and plant species on the Galápagos Islands had changed in specific ways over time in order to adapt to their local physical environments. The theory of evolution he developed from his observations has proved invaluable to understanding why organisms have the physical and social characteristics they do and how they came to have them. The key idea is natural selection: Individuals with certain traits will be better able than others to survive, reproduce, and raise their offspring to the age of viability. These more successful individuals will pass their traits on to their offspring through certain genes. In this process, a species comes to possess its signature traits, or adaptations, that enable effective responses to the physical and social environment.

> “There is grandeur in this view of life. . . . Whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.”
>
> —CHARLES DARWIN

Darwin himself believed that natural selection operates on behavioral inclinations just as it does on physical characteristics such as size, coloring, or susceptibility to parasites. Today, students of evolution are increasingly convinced that humans’ defining traits are social in nature and are inherited. These include our capacities to learn language, to cooperate, to care for very vulnerable offspring (who carry our genes!), to play, to form groups and tribes, to be wary of those different from us, and even to form beliefs about supernatural forces (e.g., Schaller, Simpson, & Kenrick, 2006; Tomasello, 2019). Scientists are looking through the lens of evolution to explain our capacity for culture, which underlies our ability to store useful knowledge about the physical and social environment (Henrich, 2016).



CartoonStock.com

The Evolution of Man. Cartoon by Wilbur Dawbarn

Table 1.1 contains a list of reputed universals. Two things are worth noting about the practices listed in the table aside from their alleged universality. One is that humans share some of these characteristics with other mammals, especially the higher primates. These include facial expressions, dominance and submission, food sharing, group living, greater aggressiveness on the part of males, preference for own kin, and wariness around snakes. The other, even more striking aspect of Table 1.1 is that the important number of universals we share with other animals is quite small.

TABLE 1.1 UNIVERSAL BEHAVIORS, REACTIONS, AND INSTITUTIONS

Sex, Gender, and the Family
Copulation normally conducted privately Sexual jealousy Sexual regulation Live in family (or household)

Marriage Husband usually older than wife Sexual modesty Division of labor by gender Males more physically aggressive Females do more child care Mother-son incest unthinkable Incest prevention and avoidance Preference for own kin Sex differences in spatial cognition
Social Differentiation
Age statuses Classification of kin Ingroup distinguished from outgroup Division of labor by age Leaders
Social Customs
Baby talk

Pretend play

Group living

Dance

Rites of passage

Law (rights and obligations)

Dominance/submission

Taboo foods

Feasting

Practice to improve skills

Body adornment

Property

Hygienic care

Death rites

Rituals

Magic to sustain and improve life

Etiquette

Taboo utterances

Magic to win love

Gossip

Toys

Decorative art

Food sharing
Emotion
Childhood fear of strangers Wariness around snakes Rhythm Facial expressions of fear, anger, disgust, happiness, sadness, and surprise Envy Melody
Cognition
Aesthetics Anthropomorphism of animals Myths Belief in supernatural, religion Medicine Taxonomy Classification of flora and fauna Language

Narrative
Source: Compiled by Brown, 1991; appearing in Pinker, 2002.

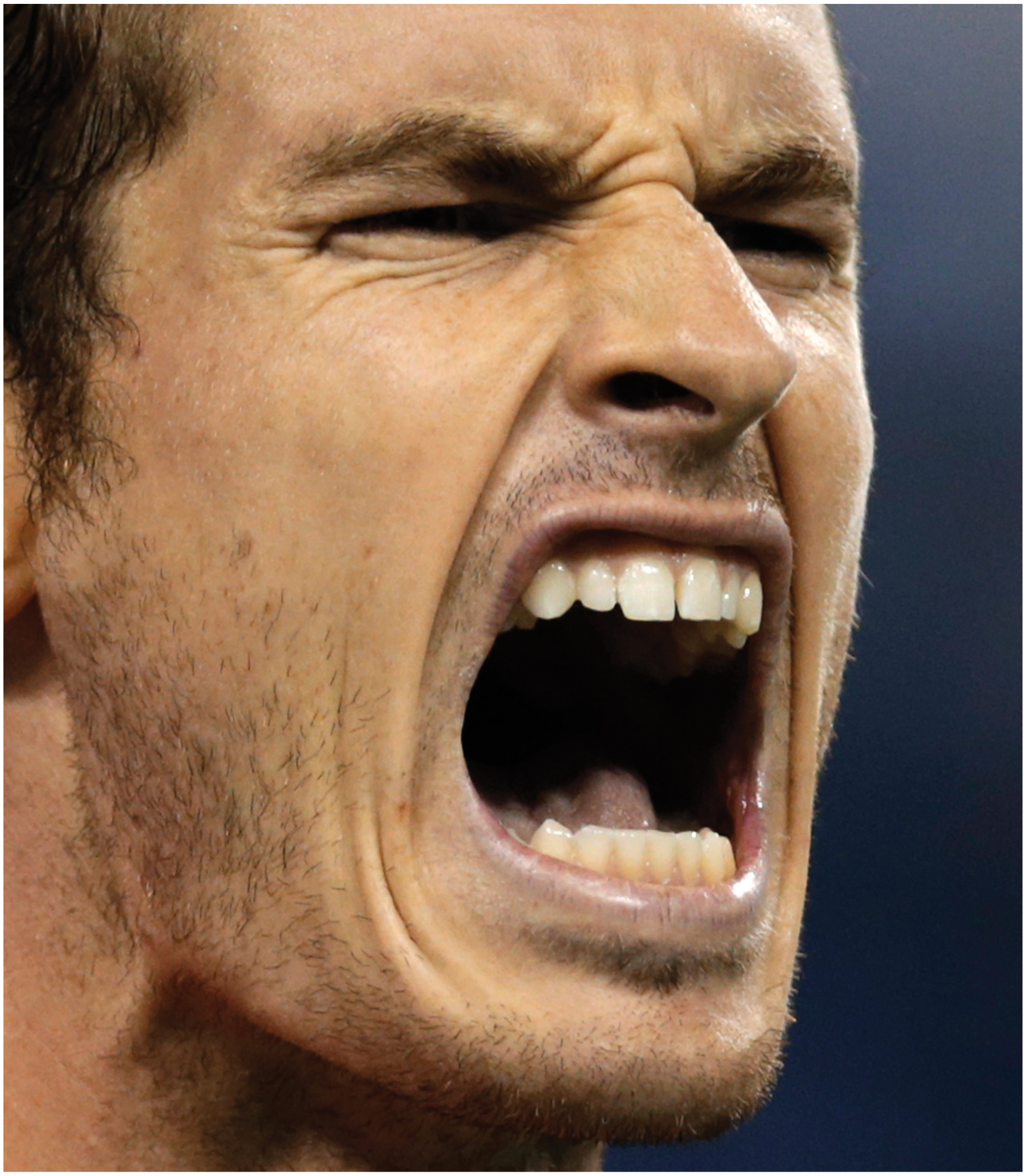
Group Living, Language, and Theory of Mind

Group living contributed to survival in ages past. Groups were required to care for highly vulnerable offspring, to provide protection from predators, and to enable greater success in hunting game and finding foraging areas. The ability to produce and understand language facilitates living in groups because it allows people to convey not only emotions and intentions but also beliefs, attitudes, and complex thoughts to others.

There is strong evidence that infants are born with their brains “prewired” to acquire language, perhaps because of its importance to humans living in groups (Pinker, 1994). Children typically learn language at developmental stages that are almost identical across different cultures. At birth, all infants can produce the full range of possible sounds (phonemes) that exist in the totality of languages spoken anywhere on Earth, and they babble all these sounds in the crib. Language acquisition consists of dropping all the “wrong” phonemes—the ones that are not used by the particular language or languages the child hears as an infant. Thus, children can learn to speak any language depending on where they grow up. They can learn to speak a language perfectly well even if they grow up with deaf parents who never speak at all. Twins can sometimes develop their own unique language in the crib, a language that follows rules of grammar in the same way that formally recognized languages do

(Pinker, 1994, 2002). These findings indicate that there are general, inherited propensities to develop grammatical language.

Just as evolution has prepared humans to live together in groups and to communicate in order to promote survival and reproduction, it may also have provided humans with a “theory of mind”—the ability to recognize that other people have beliefs and desires and that understanding others’ beliefs and desires allows us to understand and predict their behavior. Children recognize this before the age of 2 (Asch, 1952; Kuhlmeier, Wynn, & Bloom, 2003; Leslie, 2000; Malle, Moses, & Baldwin, 2001). By the age of 3 or 4, theory of mind is sophisticated enough that children can recognize when other people’s beliefs are false (Wellman, 1990).



UNIVERSAL FACIAL EXPRESSIONS Chimpanzees and humans express dominance and submission, and anger and fear, through similar facial expressions.

Some of the most powerful evidence for a biologically based theory of mind comes from studying people who, due to a genetic variation, appear to have extreme difficulty in developing a theory of mind. Such a claim has been made about people with *autism*, a condition characterized by difficulties in interacting and communicating with others—particularly in relation to mental states like feelings and thoughts. Autistic individuals have difficulty comprehending others' desires or beliefs and understanding that others' beliefs might be false (Perner et al., 1989; Tager-Flusberg, 2007). It seems plausible that evolution has provided us with a kind of understanding that is too universally essential to depend on laborious trial-and-error learning. Given the importance of accurately understanding other people's beliefs and intentions, it would not be surprising that a theory of mind comes prewired.

Avoiding the Naturalistic Fallacy

Evolutionary theory as applied to human behavior is controversial. For example, some people particularly object to the claim that there are biologically based differences between women and men in behaviors related to mate choice. Such notions are controversial in part because they follow a long history of mistaken claims about biological differences that have been used to legitimize and perpetuate male privilege (S. L. Bem, 1993).

Evolutionary claims can also lead people to assume, mistakenly, that biology is destiny—that what we are biologically predisposed to do is what we inevitably will do and perhaps even should do. This claim—that the way things are is the way they should be—is known as the naturalistic fallacy. It has no logical foundation. We are predisposed to do many things that we can overcome. Virtually all human societies are plagued by violence, for example, but the incidence of it over the past few centuries has declined dramatically. The chances of being murdered in various parts of England, for instance, declined from the thirteenth century to the twentieth by factors ranging from 10 to 100 (Pinker, 2011). The percentage of the population killed in wars has declined more or less steadily over the past few thousand years. Civilization can be regarded as the unceasing attempt to modify much of what comes naturally, reducing the extent to which human life, as seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes put it, is “poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

Just because a theory can be misused is no reason to reject the theory in all its aspects. While there is no justification for rejecting evolutionary ideas out of hand, caution about evolutionary claims is essential.

Social Neuroscience

Evolutionary approaches to social behavior alert us to the fact that everything humans do or think involves biological processes in the brain and body that have been shaped by natural selection. In recent years, social psychologists have begun to examine the biological grounding for behavior: the brain. This new field is called *social neuroscience*.

The brain may be the most complex living system in the universe, with 100 billion neurons organized into at least 50 distinct regions, and with each neuron connecting on average to 15,000 other neurons. One of the chief tools that social psychologists use to understand the brain’s role in social behavior is a technology known as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). When a person is talking with another person, making a moral judgment, or experiencing fear or outrage, blood flows to the areas of the brain that are activated. Scientists can take a picture of the brain that detects this blood flow, thus showing which brain regions are involved in the social behavior of interest.

> “The human brain is the most complex and orderly arrangement of matter in the universe.”

> —ISAAC ASIMOV

As social neuroscience has matured, it has revealed just how social the human brain is (Lieberman, 2013). Older regions of the brain that we share with other mammals appear to be involved in nonconscious, automatic reactions to our social environment. For example, the amygdala, an almond-shaped region of the brain colored yellow in **Figure 1.5**, is involved in gut feelings, especially those of a fearful nature, about salient stimuli we encounter in the environment—strangers, threatening images, people from adversarial groups (W. A. Cunningham & Brosch, 2012; Ochsner & Lieberman, 2001). Near the amygdala is another old, mammalian region of the brain known as the nucleus accumbens, colored red in Figure 1.5. This area is rich with receptors for dopamine, the chemical associated with reward. The area projects to the prefrontal cortex at the front of the brain, where we process complex thoughts and emotions. The nucleus accumbens is thought of as the brain’s “reward circuit.” It signals to the individual in quick, automatic fashion what is rewarding in the environment, be it the smile of a stranger, the opportunity to have delicious ice cream, or support from a friend (Haber & Knutson, 2010).

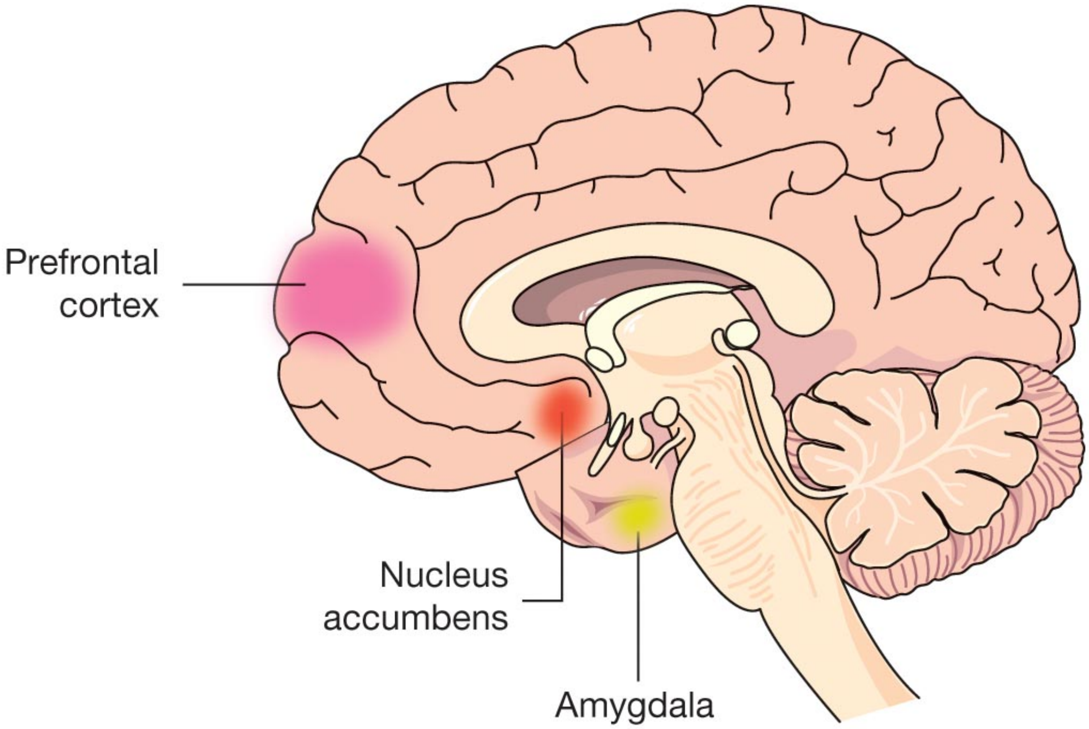
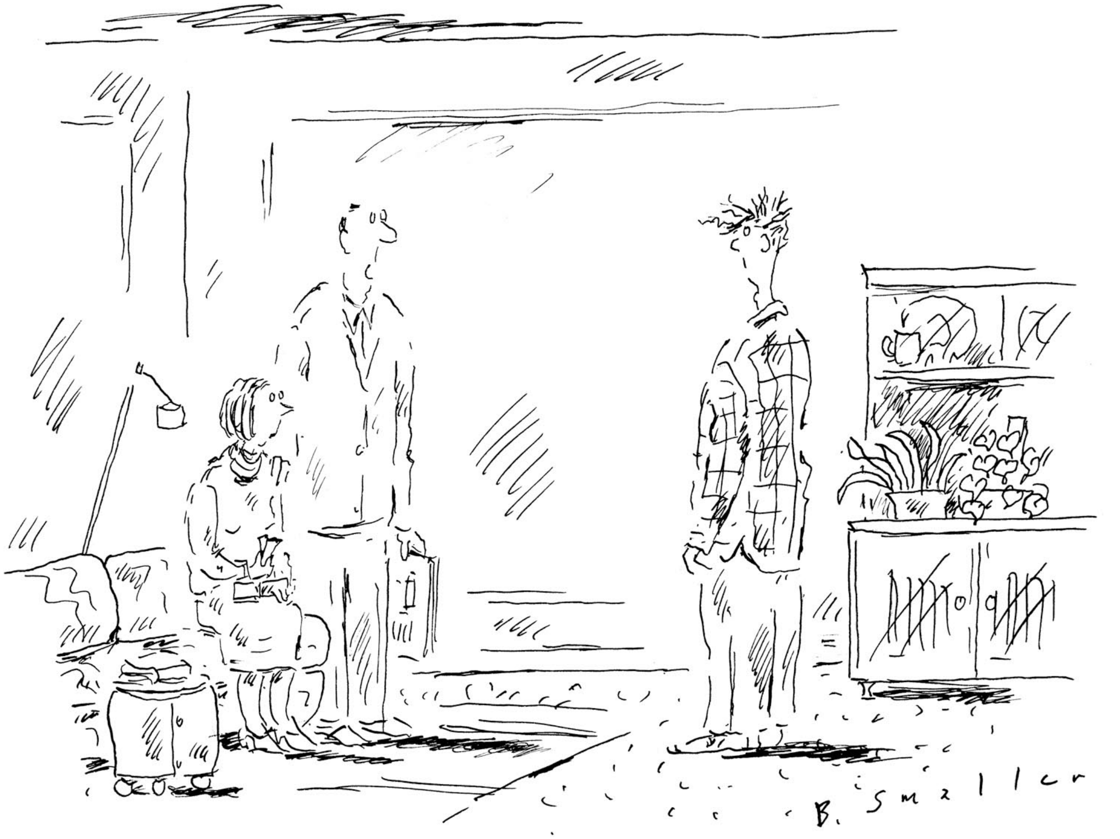


FIGURE 1.5 A SIDEWAYS VIEW OF THE BRAIN Toward the middle of the brain are regions involved in emotion, such as the amygdala and the nucleus accumbens. Those regions project to areas of the prefrontal cortex, which is involved in decision making and more controlled cognition.

What is unique about the human brain when compared with the brains of other mammals is the size of our neocortex, which consists of the layers of neurons on top of older regions of the brain, such as the amygdala. Significant areas of the neocortex are involved in reasoning, abstract thought, and memory. Some of these regions are particularly involved in social behavior. For example, some regions are involved in self-awareness (D. D. Wagner, Haxby, & Heatherton, 2012) and moral judgment concerning what is right and wrong and whether to punish or forgive (J. D. Greene, 2014). There is also an empathy network of the neocortex that enables us to experience the feelings of others (Singer & Klimecki, 2014) and a “mentalizing network” that enables us to understand other people’s mental states, intentions, desires, and beliefs

(Lieberman, 2007, 2013). People feel dramatically different when they are around people who accept them versus those who reject or shun them. It’s not surprising that acceptance and rejection activate much different regions of the brain, known as the social safety and social alarm networks (Eisenberger, 2016; Muscatell & Eisenberger, 2012).

These advances by social neuroscientists set the stage for answers to intriguing questions, such as why gaining power so often leads to its abuse or why people experience a warm glow when they cooperate with others. These discoveries have also provided a window into the development of social behavior by tracing physical changes in the brain. For example, it turns out that a region of the brain that alerts people to danger is poorly developed until early adulthood (Decety & Michalska, 2010). This late development of an important brain region may help explain why adolescents take greater risks (in how they drive, for instance) than people in their mid 20s and beyond.



“Young man, go to your room and stay there until your cerebral cortex matures.”

Neuroscience not only tells us which areas of the brain function most when certain kinds of activities are taking place. It also informs us about how the brain, the mind, and behavior function as a unit and how social factors influence each of these components at the same time.

LOOKING BACK

Evolutionary theory informs our understanding of human social behavior just as it informs our understanding of the physical characteristics of plants and animals. The fact that many of our social tendencies are universal—from language to theory of mind to our capacity to cooperate—suggests that they were advantageous to people’s survival in the course of our evolution and are supported by biological processes that emerge early in development. Although misunderstandings and misapplications of evolutionary ideas sometimes make people suspicious of them, evolution offers a rich framework for thinking about the social tendencies we all share. Social neuroscience is helping us understand what happens in the brain in different social situations.

Glossary

natural selection

An evolutionary process that molds animals and plants so that traits that enhance the probability of survival and reproduction are passed on to subsequent generations.

naturalistic fallacy

The claim that the way things are is the way they should be.

Culture and Human Behavior: How We Are Different

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify some of the fundamental differences in social structures and behavior across cultures.
- Distinguish between independent and interdependent social relations and identify some of the cultures in which each is prevalent.
- Distinguish between “tight” and “loose” cultures and identify some of the cultures in which each is prevalent.

The most important legacy of evolution for human beings is not the way it constrains behavior but rather the great flexibility it allows for adaptation to different circumstances. The enormous range of behaviors that people exhibit is associated with the fact that humans, together with rats, are the most successful of all mammals in our ability to live in virtually every type of ecosystem. Our adaptability and the range of environments in which we have evolved have resulted in extraordinary differences among human cultures. Depending on the prevailing culture, humans may be more or less likely to cooperate with each other, to assign different roles to men and women, or to try to distinguish themselves as individuals. Moreover, different cultures vary in what they deem morally wrong and how they punish transgressions.

Cultural Differences in Social Relations and Self-Understanding

Until fairly recently, psychologists regarded cultural differences as being limited to differences in beliefs, preferences, and values. Some cultures regard the world as having been created by a supernatural force, some believe it was shaped by impersonal natural forces, and some don't ponder the question much at all. The French like to eat fatty goose liver, the Chinese like to eat chicken feet, Americans like to eat cotton candy—and each group can have trouble appreciating the tastes preferred by the other groups. These differences, while interesting, don't really require deep psychological theories to understand.

Recent research, however, shows that cultural differences go far deeper than beliefs and values. In fact, they extend all the way to the level of fundamental forms of self-conception and social interaction and even to basic perceptual and cognitive processes that give rise to new thoughts and beliefs (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Many of these differences are discussed throughout this book, but one set of interrelated tendencies is particularly central, and we introduce it here.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN PREFERENCES Every culture has its distinctive preferences. Sometimes these preferences are incomprehensible to members of other cultures, such as the popularity of cotton candy in the United States. Some preferences are more central or important than food preferences—for example, independence versus interdependence.

To get a feel for this set of tendencies, think about the following propositions. How plausible do you find each one?

- People have substantial control over their life outcomes, and they much prefer situations in which they have choice and control to those in which they do not.
- People want to achieve personal success. They find that relationships with other people can sometimes make it harder to attain their goals.
- People want to be unique, to be different from other people in significant respects.
- People want to feel good about themselves. Excelling in some ways and being assured of their good qualities by other people are important to personal well-being.
- People like their relationships with others to be based on mutuality and equality, but if some people have more power than others, most people prefer to be in the superior position.
- People believe that the same rules should apply to everyone; individuals should not be singled out for special treatment because of their social role or personal attributes. Justice is, or should be, blind.

Hundreds of millions of people are reasonably well described by these propositions, but those people tend to be found in particular parts of the world—namely, Western Europe and many of the present and former nations of the British Commonwealth, including the United States, Canada, and Australia. These societies tend to be highly independent (or individualistic) cultures (A. P. Fiske et al., 1998; Henrich, 2020; Hofstede, 1980; Hsu, 1953; Markus & Conner, 2013; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). Westerners think of themselves as distinct social entities, tied to each other by bonds of affection and organizational memberships to be sure, but essentially separate from other people and having attributes that exist in the absence of any connection to others. They tend to see their associations with other people, even their own family members, as voluntary and subject to termination once those associations become sufficiently troublesome or unproductive (**Table 1.2**).

TABLE 1.2 INDEPENDENT VS. INTERDEPENDENT CULTURES

Independent Cultures	Interdependent Cultures
Conception of the self as distinct from others, with attributes that are constant	Conception of the self as inextricably linked to others, with attributes depending on the situation
Insistence on ability to act on one’s own	Preference for collective action
Need for individual distinctiveness	Desire for harmonious relations within the group
Preference for achieved status based on accomplishments	Acceptance of hierarchy and ascribed status based on age, group membership, and other attributes

Conviction that rules governing behavior should apply to everyone	Preference for rules that take context and particular relationships into account

But these characterizations provide a poor description of most of the world's people, particularly the citizens of East Asian countries such as China (Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990), Japan (M. H. Bond & Cheung, 1983), and Korea (Rhee et al., 1995), as well as people from South Asian countries such as India (Savani, Markus, & Conner, 2008), people from the Middle East (Greenberg et al., 2012), people from many Latin American countries (de Oliveira & Nisbett, 2017; Gabrielidis et al., 1997), and people from Eastern Europe (Grossmann & Kross, 2010). These societies represent more interdependent (or collectivistic) cultures. People in such cultures don't have as much freedom or personal control over their lives, and they don't necessarily want or need it (Sastry & Ross, 1998).

Such differences between people in independent and interdependent societies have important implications for the nature of their personal goals and strivings, values, and beliefs, as **Box 1.2** illustrates. For instance, success is important to many East Asians in good part because it brings credit to the family and other groups to which they belong, not because it merely reflects personal merit.

Personal uniqueness is not very important to interdependent peoples and may in fact be undesirable. In an experiment by Kim and Markus (1999), Korean and American participants were offered a pen as a gift for being in a study. Several of the pens were of one color and one pen was of another color. Americans tended to choose the unique color and Koreans the common color. Being unique and being better than others are not so important for interdependent people to feel good about themselves; moreover, feeling good about themselves is itself not as important a goal as it is for Westerners and other independent peoples (Heine et al., 1999).

> Among traditional Kenyan tribespeople, the individualist is “looked upon with suspicion. . . . There is no really individual affair, for everything has a moral and social influence.”
>
> —JOMO KENYATTA, FIRST PRESIDENT OF INDEPENDENT KENYA

Interdependent people tend not to expect or even value mutuality and equality in relationships; on the contrary, they’re likely to expect hierarchical relations to be the rule (Hsu, 1953; Triandis, 1987, 1995). They tend not to be universalists in their understanding of social norms; instead, they believe in different strokes for different folks. Justice should keep her eyes wide open, paying attention to the particular circumstances of each case that comes before her.

To the extent that culture influences deep patterns of thinking and feeling—a central theme in this book—we would expect these influences to be reflected in differences in a person’s brain—for example, the density of neurons in a region that supports culture-related thought. And indeed, culture shapes the human brain. In one recent study, 265 Chinese participants had images of their brains taken and then completed measures of how independent (“I do whatever I believe is right”) or interdependent (“I regularly sacrifice for the group”) they were (Wang et al., 2017). Those participants who were more independent actually showed denser gray matter (increased cell bodies of neurons) in a region of the cortex that supports thought about the self (the ventromedial prefrontal cortex) and a region of the brain that is believed to support thoughts of self-agency (the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex).

BOX 1.2

FOCUS ON CULTURE

Dick and Jane, Deng and Janxing

The first page of a reader for American children from the 1930s shows a little boy running with his dog. “See Dick run,” the primer reads. “See Dick run and play.” The first page of a Chinese reader from the same era shows a little boy sitting on the shoulders of a bigger boy. “Big Brother loves Little Brother,” reads the text. “Little Brother loves Big Brother.” The difference between what the American child and the Chinese child of the 1930s were exposed to on the first day of school says much about the differences between their worlds. The American child is taught to orient toward action and to be prepared to live in a world where control and individual choice are normal. The Chinese child is more likely to be taught to be attuned to relationships. To Westerners, it makes sense to speak of the existence of the person apart from any group. To East Asians (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean people, for example) and to many of the world’s other peoples, the person exists only as a member of a larger collective—family, friends, village, corporation. People are related to one another like ropes in a net, completely interconnected and having no real existence without the connections (Munro, 1985).

INTERDEPENDENT VERSUS INDEPENDENT CULTURES People from interdependent cultures are more likely to value group activities, whereas people from independent cultures are more likely to value solitary activities.

Some Qualifications

Much of the early research on the distinction between independence and interdependence focused on comparing Western countries with East Asian ones, but there appear to be variations of interdependence and independence in other cultures as well. For example, in Hispanic cultures more than in Asian American cultures, interdependence involves what is called *familialism*, a social value defined by interpersonal warmth, closeness, and support (Campos & Kim, 2017; Sabogal et al., 1987). Latinos who feel a great sense of familialism enjoy greater well-being and stronger relationships, but they also experience greater stress, particularly when faced with moving away from family—for example, to attend a faraway college (Campos et al., 2014).

Recent research has also extended the independence/interdependence framework to the understanding of another kind of culture—social class—which captures the degree of wealth, education, and occupational prestige a person enjoys (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011). Within many cultures, there are social class differences in independence versus interdependence (Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2012; Markus & Conner, 2013; Stephens, Markus, & Phillips, 2014). Working-class or lower socio-economic status (SES) people in modern societies are more interdependent than middle-class individuals (Markus & Conner, 2013). Working-class people have more interactions with their families than middle- and upper-class individuals do (Allan, 1979), their parenting styles emphasize conformity and obedience more than those of middle-class individuals (Kohn, 1969), and they value personal uniqueness less than middle-class individuals do.

A study by Nicole Stephens and her colleagues provides a striking example of the different values placed on uniqueness (Stephens, Markus, & Townsend, 2007). The researchers asked people how they would feel if a friend bought a car just like one they had recently bought themselves. Middle-class people were likely to report that they would be disappointed because they like to be unique; working-class people were more likely to say they would be very happy to share that similarity with a buddy. Middle-class people also appear to care much more about exercising choice than do working-class people. Middle-class people were found to like an object that they had chosen better than one they were given; the reverse was true for working-class people (Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2011).

FAMILIALISM AND LATIN CULTURES Familialism—close contact with extended family, who provide strong emotional and material support—is particularly characteristic of Latin American cultures.

Bear in mind that it’ s probably not accurate to put any society entirely in one box or another, to say that some are independent in all respects and others are interdependent in all respects. The American South, for example, is more interdependent than much of the rest of the country in that family connections and community ties tend to be more important (Vandello & Cohen, 1999). However, the South has also been described as more tolerant of character quirks and various kinds of social deviance than other regions of the country (Reed, 1990). These are clearly individualistic tendencies.

As a final qualification, researchers have found that the same person can have a relatively independent orientation in some situations (such as competing in a debate tournament) and a relatively interdependent orientation in others (such as singing in a choir; Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999; Kühnen & Oyserman, 2002).

Why should cultures, and individuals within a given culture, differ in their degree of independent versus interdependent social orientation? There are two broad factors that seem to be important. The first is economic: How is income earned? In cultures where earning a living depends on cooperation with others, such as large-scale agriculture, people tend toward interdependence. In cultures where many people can earn a living in solitary ventures, such as trading, herding, and keeping small “kitchen” gardens, people tend to be more independent. Even within a given nation, differing economic conditions may lead to substantial differences in social orientation (Uskul et al., 2008). For example, agriculture in the south of China is based primarily on rice cultivation, which depends on intense, sustained cooperation among many individuals, whereas agriculture in the north of China is generally based on wheat, which can be farmed with much less reliance on cooperation. Southern Chinese are more interdependent than northern Chinese (Talhelm et al., 2014).

A second factor that drives differences in social orientation is the degree to which complex social relations are based on associations with kin, which is typically found in societies organized along the lines of extended families, clans, and tribes. Social relations of this kind are common in East Asia and the Mediterranean basin (Henrich, 2020). Interdependence is the norm in such societies, whereas independence is characteristic of societies where there are few strong ties to people outside the nuclear family. Whereas differences in social orientation can be found even within a society if there are differences in the degree of organization on the basis of kin relation. Kin relations are central in southern Italy, which is relatively interdependent, and much more limited in northern Italy, which is relatively independent (Knight & Nisbett, 2007).

Rule Makers and Rule Breakers

Recently, important work by Michele Gelfand and her colleagues (Gelfand, 2018; Jackson & Gelfand, 2017) has uncovered another major dimension that differentiates societies. Some societies are relatively “tight,” in that there tend to be strict rules governing behavior, and conformity to those rules is demanded. Other societies are relatively “loose,” in that rules are fewer and less strictly enforced. Germany and China are examples of tight cultures, and the United States and Australia are examples of loose cultures. There is actually substantial variation within the United States on this dimension. In general, the southern states are tightest and the northeastern and western states are loosest (**Figure 1.6**). Gelfand and her colleagues maintain that societies tend to become tighter when they are under threat from sources such as frequent invasion, natural disasters, and chronic food scarcity.

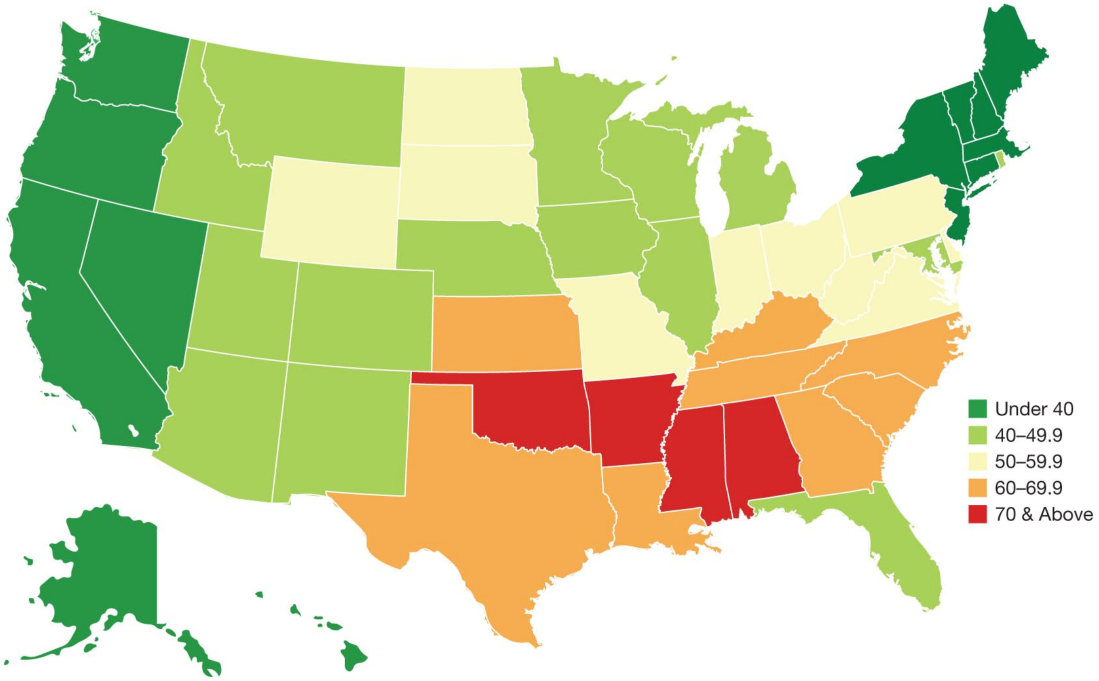


FIGURE 1.6 “TIGHT” VERSUS “LOOSE” CULTURES The degree of tightness versus looseness of different U.S. states. In general, southern states score highest in tightness on the Gelfand et al. (2011) tightness-looseness scale, whereas northeastern and western states score loosest. Source: Adapted from Harrington & Gelfand, 2014. Original figure in black and white.

Culture and Gender Roles

Earlier, our discussion focused on some aspects of gender roles that seem to be universal. But gender roles vary greatly around the world and, as already noted, can even vary within subcultures in the same country. Male dominance is one of the most variable aspects of gender roles. In hunter-gatherer societies, the predominant male role is to hunt; the predominant female role is to gather plants. Despite the sharp demarcation of gender roles, such societies are relatively gender-egalitarian. In fact, hunter-gatherer social structures are characterized by generally weak hierarchies in which leaders have little power over others. Many Western cultures are also relatively gender-egalitarian, especially northwestern European countries and most especially Scandinavian countries. For example, women constitute almost half the membership of the parliament in Sweden. The relative status of women in the rest of the world ranges from the Scandinavian extreme of equality to near-slavery conditions for women in other parts of the world.

The kinds of sexual relations that are considered normal and appropriate also vary enormously. Overwhelmingly, polygyny (one man with several wives) and serial monogamy are the most common practices among the world’s subcultures—and that may have been the case for thousands of years. The traditional American ideal of lifetime monogamy is a rarity. The United States is considered decidedly prudish by many Western Europeans, for whom extramarital affairs are commonplace. On the other hand, in certain cultures, women (and sometimes men) who are suspected of having extramarital affairs are put to death. Indeed, a woman who is raped might be expelled from the family circle or even killed. Gay and lesbian people in some societies may be put to death. Until just a generation or so ago, gays and lesbians in certain European countries were routinely sentenced to prison. In contrast, in some Native American cultures, “two-spirit” people, who are considered a distinct gender that is neither male nor female, are admired. And in yet other cultures, same-sex relations are so unremarkable that there is no term for them or for people who engage in them.

(A)

(B)

(C)

(D)

CULTURE AND GENDER ROLES Women constitute almost 50 percent of politicians in Scandinavia. Their representation goes all the way to the top. (A) Katrin Jakobsdottir, prime minister of Iceland (2017 – present). (B) Erna Solberg, prime minister of Norway (2013 – 2021). (C) Sanna Marin, prime minister of Finland (2019–present). (D) Mette Frederiksen, prime minister of Denmark (2015–present).

It’s a matter of some disagreement among social scientists whether the different sexual mores (norms) that characterize various cultures are merely arbitrary or whether most of them have economic or other practical roots. An example of an economic explanation concerns farmers in Nepal and Tibet who practice a form of polyandry: one wife with many husbands who are brothers. This system serves the economic goal of keeping scarce agricultural land in one family and produces just one set of related heirs per generation. A similar purpose was served by primogeniture, a common rule in Western Europe that only the firstborn male could inherit land. Otherwise, estates would be broken up into ever-smaller units, and the original power of the landowning family would dwindle away until it reached the status of ordinary peasants.

In this book, we frequently return to discussions of gender. Research has found that women and men differ in how they understand themselves as well as in their emotions and motivations. But there are many ways of constructing gender, and these diverse patterns are far from being constant across cultures.

WEIRD Societies and the Generalizability of Social Psychology Findings

The kinds of cultural differences described in this book alert us to the fact that many of the findings of social psychology have been obtained from a very limited range of people—namely, mostly middle-class individuals living in what Henrich and his colleagues (2010, 2020) refer to as societies that are WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic). If a given finding is known to obtain more widely, we report this, and if research shows that the finding is not obtained in some societies we report that as well. But for most findings we report we simply do not know how widely they obtain. As research continues in other communities, we will have ever more knowledge about generality. And research is continuing apace, as scientists from a larger range of backgrounds contribute to our knowledge.

Culture and Evolution as Tools for Understanding Situations

Both evolution and culture affect how people see the world and behave within it. The two together are complementary ways of understanding social relations. For the first hundred thousand years or so of human existence, our ancestors were largely concerned with the necessities of surviving, reproducing, and nourishing their young in a fundamentally social environment. Such challenges may have resulted in the evolution of prewired inclinations toward certain behaviors and ways of thinking. But such inclinations are tools that can be applied flexibly or not at all. And many, if not most, of these tools are highly modifiable by culture (Sperber, 1996). Different ecologies and economies placed people in situations that varied markedly from one another and in turn produced different social systems and practices.

Evolution has given us the capacity for an astonishingly wide range of behaviors. Whether a society develops a particular prewired inclination or not may depend on how adaptive the behavior is for the ecological, economic, and cultural circumstances in which people find themselves (Sperber, 1996). Far from making us rigidly programmed automatons, evolution has equipped us with a large repertoire of tools for dealing with the enormous range of circumstances that humans confront.

Our circumstances and our high intelligence determine which tools we develop and which tendencies we try to override.

LOOKING BACK

People in some cultures are characteristically independent or individualistic, whereas people in many other societies are more likely to be interdependent or collectivist. Independence involves defining the self as having attributes that exist apart from one’s relations with other people. Those who are more interdependent define themselves in terms of their relations with others. These differences have important implications for many of the most important phenomena of social psychology. Gender roles and sexual mores are examples of behaviors that differ widely from one culture to another. Evolution and culture both make important contributions to understanding human social behavior. Evolution predisposes us to certain behaviors, but culture determines which behaviors are likely to be developed in particular situations.

Glossary

independent (individualistic) culture

A culture in which people tend to think of themselves as distinct social entities, tied to each other by voluntary bonds of affection and organizational memberships but essentially separate from other people and having attributes that exist in the absence of any connection to others.

interdependent (collectivistic) culture

A culture in which people tend to define themselves as part of a collective, inextricably tied to others in their group and placing less importance on individual freedom or personal control over their lives.

The Uses of Social Psychology

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Explain how social psychology teaches reasoning skills along with facts about behavior.
- Use critical thinking tools to assess information received from a variety of sources.
- Describe how an understanding of social psychology can help people improve their lives.

When you decided to take this course, you knew you were going to learn some interesting things about human behavior. You may have even hoped that the knowledge would be helpful in your daily life. Indeed it will be. But you will gain more from this course than you might have anticipated.

Social Psychology and Critical Thinking

Many of your college courses teach not only facts and methods of research but also how to reason. Mathematics courses, for example, teach rules of logic. Literature courses teach how to read a text closely to derive intended meanings that may not be obvious on the surface. Such reasoning tools can be applied broadly in everyday professional and personal life.

It’ s our belief that there is no better way to improve critical thinking than to study social psychology. Courses in social psychology present a great deal of information about scientific methods. Unlike most other sciences, though, social psychology presents those methods in the context of common everyday events. This makes it easier to learn to apply them very broadly to daily problems.

USING SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY The potential uses of social psychology are boundless. Examples include how to structure work or study groups (such as the one pictured here) to maximize performance, how to combat bullying in schools, how to reduce prejudice and discrimination, and how to craft a public service campaign.

Take, for example, statistics. The examples used in statistics courses typically concern agricultural plots, IQ tests, and other phenomena not drawn from ordinary life, which means that statistics courses by themselves have a limited impact on critical reasoning (Nisbett, 2015). When knowledge about statistics is applied to everyday life, however, the gain for reasoning in general is very great. People will come to apply statistical heuristics, or rules of thumb, to choices they make each day, to understanding the behavior of other people, and to scientific claims they encounter in the media. The same is true of many methodological concepts, such as the need for control groups.

Two of the authors of this book have written a great deal about how to improve critical thinking (Belsky & Gilovich, 1999; Gilovich, 1991; Nisbett, 2015, 2017; Nisbett et al., 1987; Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Much of what they have shown to be effective is achieved to a substantial extent in a social psychology course. But we believe that you can do even more to improve your critical thinking skills by engaging in exercises that make use of the scientific tools you will develop by reading about research on a range of topics. To bring home lessons in critical reasoning, we highlight in each chapter various ways of applying critical tools to everyday life events.

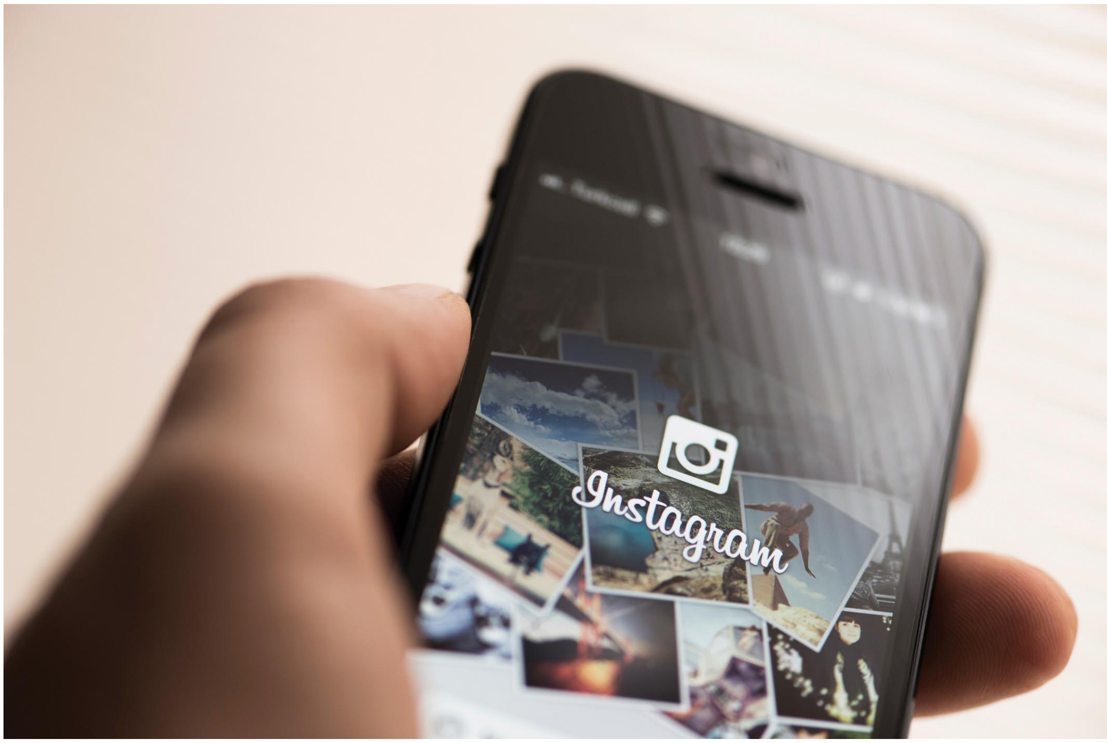
Good reasoning principles are essential to understanding the world. But they aren’t enough. Almost as important as having good reasoning principles is making sure that the information we are reasoning about is accurate. Unfortunately, much of the information available to us is distorted or flat-out wrong. This is partly because our techniques for getting information are flawed. We are often content with inadequate or mistaken information, hastily obtained or obtained by means of cognitive processes that are prone to error. Information provided to us by others can be misleading or false—sometimes intentionally so. To help you develop better critical thinking skills, at many places in the book we point to mistaken procedures for obtaining and interpreting information made available to us by friends and family, the media (including social media), and the internet. We also propose techniques for ensuring that information about important matters is as accurate as possible.

Uses and Abuses of Social Media

Today there are over 2.9 billion people on Facebook, 70 percent of whom are active users who have logged into Facebook sometime in the past month. Every day, users upload 350 million photos. As of July 2022, over 50 billion photos had been shared on Instagram worldwide. It is estimated that people share 10 billion emojis a day worldwide. Social media have been pivotal to recent political protests, from the upheaval in Myanmar to the Black Lives Matter demonstrations following the killing of George Floyd, and they have been central to the dynamics of every election campaign around the world.

It doesn’t surprise social psychologists that these relatively new platforms are so widely used, for humans are a highly social species that will connect and communicate through whatever media are available. But the density and prevalence of social media—Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, Tumblr, and TikTok, to name a few—raise the overarching question of what our social lives and selves are like online. Throughout this book, we will draw on the social psychology of social media to seek answers to this question. We will consider, for example, when too much Facebook use might get you down, what your identity is like online, and how our attitudes and behaviors are influenced by new communication technologies.

Social Psychology and the Good Life



SOCIAL MEDIA: USES AND ABUSES Through social media, we have almost limitless access to information from and about other people and current events. This can make us informed or misinformed, happy or unhappy, depending on how we use it.

In the past 20 years, social psychologists have turned their attention to one of the most personally relevant questions that people have been asking for centuries: What is happiness? The answer to this question matters more than you might imagine. A wealth of studies find that feeling happy is associated with greater marital satisfaction, heightened creativity and productivity, and more robust physical health. Seeking to understand what makes us happy isn’ t just narcissistic navel-gazing; the quest has wide-ranging and important implications for the kinds of lives we will lead.

How, then, might you find happiness? The answers to this question are myriad and nuanced and depend critically on what stage of life you are in, your cultural background, and your upbringing. But hundreds of studies from social psychology offer some wisdom that you might consider in your pursuit of the good life. You’ll learn that certain things we might assume would influence our happiness profoundly—money, for example, and getting old—don’t shape our well-being as much as we might think. You’ll also learn about simple practices that have been shown to boost happiness, such as being generous, expressing gratitude to others, and valuing experiences over material objects.

THE GOOD LIFE Social psychology has provided us with lots of clues about what makes us happy and what makes us unhappy—clues that just living doesn’t necessarily provide.

The good life also requires that you learn how to handle the stress that comes with being overwhelmed by the circumstances that you face. Regrettably, people are experiencing more stress today than they did 30 years ago (S. Cohen & Janicki-Deverts, 2012). And stress, especially when it is chronic, can have extraordinary costs for your health, increasing the likelihood of disease and even damaging your DNA. In light of these effects of stress, we present scientifically tested ideas about how to handle stress in your personal life—practices such as learning how to distance yourself a bit from your problems, avoiding rumination and unnecessary worry, and practicing mindful meditation.

LOOKING BACK

In addition to learning many useful facts about human behavior, this course will substantially improve your critical thinking, help you make the most of your use of social media, and detail many ways to improve the quality of your life.

Chapter Review

SUMMARY

Characterizing Social Psychology

- *Social psychology* is the scientific study of the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals in social situations.

The Power of the Situation

- Social psychology emphasizes the influence of situations on behavior. People often find it difficult to see the role that powerful situations can play in producing their own and others’ behavior and so are inclined to overemphasize the importance of personal dispositions in producing behavior. These two tendencies together are called the *fundamental attribution error*.

The Role of Construal

- Social psychology also focuses on the role of *construal* in understanding situations. People often feel that their comprehension of situations is direct, without much mediating thought. In fact, even the perception of the simplest objects rests on substantial inference and the complex cognitive structures that exist for carrying it out.
- The primary tool that people use for understanding social situations (and physical stimuli, for that matter) is the *schema*. A schema is an organized body of stored

information that is used to understand events. They tell us how to interpret situations and how to behave in them. *Stereotypes* are schemas of people of various kinds—police officers, homemakers, yuppies. Stereotypes serve to guide interpretation and behavior, but they can often be mistaken or misapplied, and they can lead to damaging interactions and unjust behaviors.

Automatic Versus Controlled Processing

- People’s construals of situations are largely automatic and nonconscious. As a consequence, people are sometimes in the dark about how they reached a particular conclusion or why they behaved in a particular way.
- People perceive many things nonconsciously and have little access to cognitive processes, in part because they have no need for conscious access to these processes.

Evolution and Human Behavior: How We Are the Same

- The evolutionary perspective focuses on practices and understandings that are universal and seem to be indispensable to social life, suggesting that humans are prewired to engage in those practices. *Natural selection* has operated on human behaviors just as it has on physical traits.
- Some evolutionary theorists talk about universal characteristics that are cognitive in nature, including language, which appears at the same stage of development in all cultures, and theory of mind, which also develops early in people of all cultures.
- Prewiring does not imply lack of modifiability. Human behavior is highly susceptible to change. To assume that humans have a genetic predisposition to behave in

particular ways does not mean that it is right to behave in those ways. Believing that because things are a particular way means they should be that way is to commit the *naturalistic fallacy*.

Culture and Human Behavior: How We Are Different

- Behaviors and meanings can differ dramatically across cultures. Many of these differences involve the degree to which a society is *independent*, or *individualistic* (characterized by fewer social relationships of a looser sort), or whether it is *interdependent*, or *collectivistic* (characterized by many relationships of a highly prescribed nature). These differences influence conceptions of the self and the nature of human relationships as well as basic cognitive and perceptual processes.
- Gender roles and sexual mores differ enormously across cultures. Even within the West, gender and sexual practices diverge significantly. Theorists differ in how strongly they believe that this variability is arbitrary versus rooted in economic factors or some other aspect of the objective situation confronting the culture.

The Uses of Social Psychology

- When applied to everyday life events, scientific methods provide reasoning skills that are very widely applicable. An understanding of scientific methods will improve your critical thinking and help you make optimal use of social media.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. What does the Milgram experiment on obedience demonstrate about the power of the situation? What features of the experimental situation might have increased the likelihood that participants would continue to shock the learner even after the learner showed signs of pain?
2. Why are schemas so important for social interaction? What is your schema for being a student in a classroom? What might happen if you didn’t have that schema?
3. When trying to understand people’s thoughts, feelings, and motivations, why don’t researchers just ask them? What does research on automatic versus controlled processing tell us about people’s awareness of their own mental states?
4. How does evolution help explain social behavior? What are some types of behaviors that seem most likely to be explained by evolution, and what behaviors seem less likely?
5. What is the naturalistic fallacy, and why is it so important to avoid when considering evolutionary explanations?
6. How do Western and Eastern countries differ in their beliefs about the role of the self in relation to the group? How might these beliefs lead to different behaviors in an academic setting?
7. Are evolutionary and cultural explanations for behavior compatible, or do they conflict?

The answer guidelines for the Think About It questions can be found at the back of the book . . .

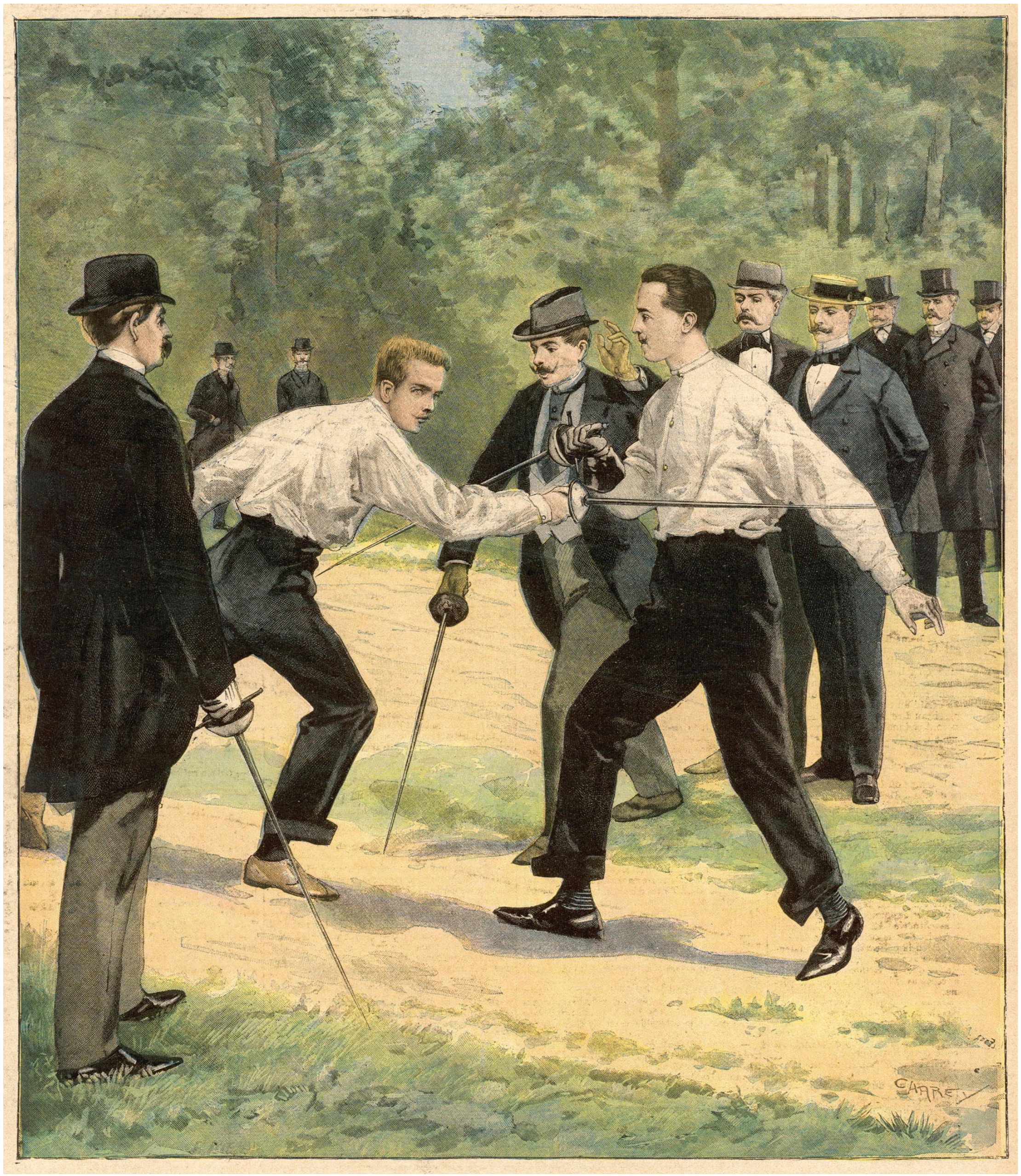
ONLINE STUDY MATERIALS

Want to earn a better grade on your test?

Go to **inQuizitive** to learn and review this chapter’s content, with personalized feedback along the way.

CHAPTER
2

The Methods of Social Psychology



Is there a regional culture of honor in which people are generally more accepting of crimes that have been committed to protect one’s honor?

What are the benefits of conducting a longitudinal study spanning decades?

OUTLINE

- The Value of Social Psychological Research
- How Social Psychologists Test Ideas
- The Criteria of Sound Research
- Ethical Concerns in Social Psychological Research
- Basic and Applied Science

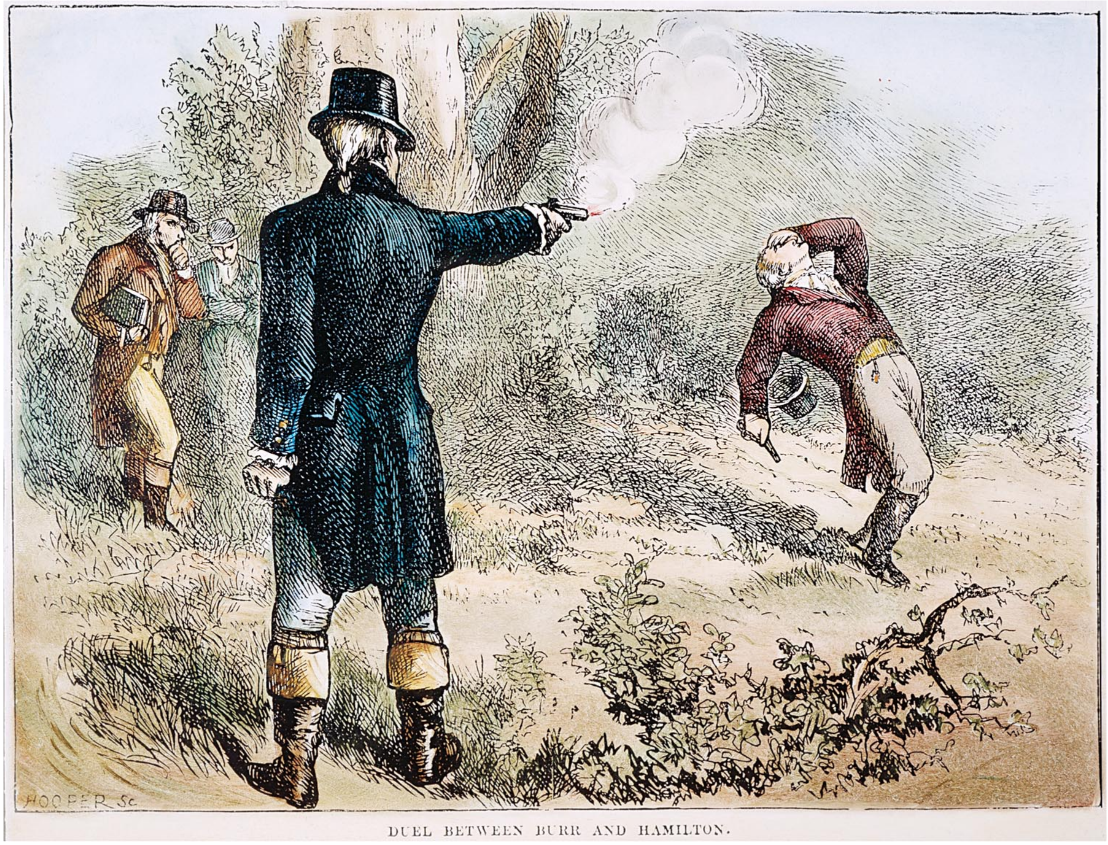
RETAIL BUSINESS OWNERS ACROSS THE NORTHERN and Southern United States received the following letter from a job applicant who described himself as a hardworking 27-year-old man relocating to the potential employer’s town. Among a set of appropriate qualifications listed in the letter, the applicant described one striking blemish on his record:

> There is one thing I must explain, because I feel I must be honest and want no misunderstandings. I have been convicted of a felony, namely manslaughter. You will probably want an explanation for this before you send me an application, so I will provide it. I got into a fight with someone who was having an affair with my fiancée. . . . One night this person confronted me in front of my friends at the bar. He told everyone that he and my fiancée were sleeping together. He laughed at me to my face and asked me to step outside if I was man enough. I was young and didn’t want to back down from a challenge in front of everyone. As we went into the alley, he started to attack me. He knocked me down, and he picked up a bottle. I could have run away and the judge said I should have, but my pride wouldn’t let me. Instead I picked up a pipe that was laying in the alley and hit him with it. I didn’t mean to kill him, but he died a few hours later at the hospital.

Some business owners who received the letter replied and complied with the applicant’s requests, providing a job application, the name of a contact person, or a phone number to call. Some even sent a personal note along with their response.

In truth, however, the applicant was a fictional character created by two social psychologists in a carefully planned study (D. Cohen & Nisbett, 1997). The investigators measured the degree to which potential employers responded to the applicant’s inquiry. If there was a note, the researchers rated how sympathetic it seemed—how encouraging it was and whether it mentioned an appreciation for the applicant’s candor.

Dov Cohen and Richard Nisbett found distinct patterns in the replies. Retailers from the South complied with the applicant’s requests more frequently than those from the North did. And the notes from Southern business owners were much warmer and more sympathetic. One Southern retailer wrote in her letter:


HOOPER Sc.
DUEL BETWEEN BURR AND HAMILTON.

DEFENDING ONE’S HONOR Duels, like the one depicted here between Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton, were practiced in the United States well into the nineteenth century. They were called “affairs of honor.”

> As for your problem of the past, anyone could probably be in the situation you were in. It was just an unfortunate incident that shouldn’t be held against you. Your honesty shows that you are sincere. . . .
>
> I wish you the best of luck for your future. You have a positive attitude and a willingness to work. Those are the qualities that businesses look for in an employee. Once you get settled, if you are near here, please stop in and see us.

No letter from a Northern employer was remotely as sympathetic.

Why were the Southerners seemingly so accepting of murder? You will find out in this chapter. More important, you will learn *how* the investigators found out. In addressing this question, the investigators employed most of the methods at the disposal of social psychologists—methods that deepen our understanding of human behavior and, in so doing, give us some tools to benefit society. ■

The Value of Social Psychological Research

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- Explain why social psychological research sometimes contradicts our intuitions about human behavior.

Why do social psychologists conduct research? Why is it useful to read about it? First and foremost, strategies for dealing with many of today’s most pressing problems—climate change, growing income inequality, ethnic and gender bias, sexual harassment, political polarization and intolerance—can be informed by findings from social psychology.

But even beyond helping people deal with important contemporary challenges, social psychological research can provide us with a clearer understanding of less-weighty aspects of everyday life. To be sure, we can get along perfectly well from day to day without the lessons of social psychology. Our lives can be reasonably predictable: Most of the situations we find ourselves in are similar to other familiar situations, and our observations about how people behave in those situations are generally accurate enough to allow us to get by with some confidence in the correctness of our predictions.

But many situations—dating, interviews, political discussions with friends—contain surprises and pitfalls that social psychological research can help us anticipate and avoid. And even in familiar situations, our ideas about how people are likely to behave can be mistaken. Chapters 4, 10, and 11 describe some of these mistaken beliefs about social behavior and how those beliefs get formed.

Our beliefs about *why* we behave as we do can also be mistaken (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). As discussed in Chapter 1, many of the factors that influence our behavior are hidden from us: They aren’t available in conscious, verbal form but rather occur in nonconscious, nonverbal forms that aren’t accessible to introspection. Fortunately, social psychological research can give us insight into the reasons not just for other people’s behavior but for our own as well.

To see how social psychological research can illuminate even familiar aspects of human behavior and its causes, take a look at Box 2.1. Make your own guesses about the outcomes of the research described, and then see how accurate your guesses are. Predicting the results of studies *before* you find out what the actual results were allows you to avoid the hindsight bias, or the tendency to believe after learning about some outcome that you could have predicted it—when in fact you might not have been able to predict it at all.

Once we hear some new fact, it’s easy to think of reasons why it might be true. Coming up with those reasons can leave us with the feeling that we could have predicted this fact when often we couldn’t have. In psychological research demonstrating the hindsight bias, people in one group are told a fact and asked if they would have predicted it, whereas people in another group are not told the fact but instead asked for their predictions. It’s very common for the people kept in ignorance to make incorrect predictions, while those told the fact are confident that they could have predicted it correctly (Bradfield & Wells, 2005; Fischhoff et al., 2005; Guilbault et al., 2004).

LOOKING BACK

Social psychological research shows us that some of our beliefs about how people behave are mistaken. Our beliefs about the reasons for our own behavior can also be mistaken. Social psychological findings sometimes seem obvious, but often only *after* we know what they are. The hindsight bias mistakenly convinces us that we would have known the correct answer had we been asked to predict the finding.

Glossary

hindsight bias

People’s tendency after learning about a given outcome to be overconfident about whether they could have predicted that outcome.

How Social Psychologists Test Ideas

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- Identify the methods social psychologists use most frequently in their research and some pros and cons of each method.

> “The scientific method itself would not have led anywhere, it would not even have been born without a passionate striving for clear understanding.”
>
> —ALBERT EINSTEIN, *OUT OF MY LATER YEARS*

Social psychologists use a wide variety of methods to test hypotheses about human behavior. As you read about these methods in this chapter and see them applied elsewhere in the book, keep in mind that each method is useful in some way for getting at the truth of propositions about social behavior. Even if you can’t conduct a study to test a particular proposition because resources are insufficient or because it would be unethical, thinking through how you *could* test a given idea can lead you to new ideas that, on reflection, might surpass your initial speculation. Such an exercise is called a *thought experiment*, and it’s one of the most useful critical thinking skills you’ll learn from reading this book. To conduct a thought experiment, you need to speculate about the results you might obtain under two different sets of circumstances. Although this is no substitute for actually collecting data, a thought experiment can help clarify your assumptions and general conceptual understanding of the phenomenon in question.

BOX 2.1

FOCUS ON INTUITIVE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Predicting Research Results

Try to predict how people would behave in each of these situations. Put a check by the answer you believe to be correct before you see the right answer. If you don’t commit yourself in this way, you’ll be vulnerable to the hindsight bias.

1. Does familiarity breed liking or contempt? Would you be likely to prefer (a) a song you had heard many times on the radio or (b) one you had heard less often?
2. Suppose some people were persuaded to lie about their beliefs about a certain matter. Would those people be more inclined to adjust their beliefs in the direction of the lie if they were paid (a) a small amount of money, (b) a large amount of money, or (c) no money at all?
3. Suppose you knew that an acquaintance wanted a favor from you that was somewhat inconvenient for you to grant. Would you like him better if (a) he refrained from asking you the favor, (b) he asked

you to do the favor and you complied, or (c) he asked you to do the favor and you regretfully turned him down?

4. Suppose you got a friend to think seriously for a few minutes about the inevitability of death. Would those thoughts likely make her feel (a) more helpless, (b) more favorably inclined toward her fellow human beings, or (c) more patriotic?
5. Suppose male college students were asked to grade an essay written for an English class, and a picture of the female student who allegedly wrote the essay was attached to it. Would the grade be higher if (a) she was very pretty, (b) she was average-looking, (c) she was quite plain-looking, or (d) the student grading the essay was about as good-looking as the supposed author?
6. Suppose people were asked to choose between an option with substantial potential gain but also substantial risk and another option that entailed less potential gain but also less risk. Would people be more likely to choose the risky option if (a) they considered the choice by themselves or (b) they considered the choice in discussion with a small group; or (c) would it make no difference?
7. Suppose you offered a reward to some nursery school children if they would draw with some special markers, and all the children who were offered the reward drew with them. Would these children be (a) more likely, (b) less likely, or (c) equally likely to play with the markers at a subsequent time than children who were never offered the reward but got one anyway?
8. Suppose you asked a group of people to report 6 instances when they behaved in an assertive fashion, another group to report 12 instances when they behaved in an assertive fashion, and a third group to report 6 instances of some other behavior

altogether, such as instances of introverted behavior. Which group would later report that they were most assertive: (a) the group asked for 6 instances of assertive behavior, (b) the group asked for 12 instances of assertive behavior, (c) the group asked about some other behavior; or (d) would it make little difference what the group was asked?

A hypothesis is a prediction about what will happen under particular circumstances—for example, in a research study. A theory is a set of related propositions intended to describe some phenomenon or aspect of the world. Speaking casually, people sometimes say that something is "just a theory" meaning it's a notion largely unsupported by facts. In science, including social science, theories generally have support in the form of empirical data, and they often entail predictions that would be surprising except in light of the theory. Many theories in the history of science have led to a greater understanding of natural phenomena or to important real-life consequences. Evolutionary theory is supported by an enormous number of facts as well as nonintuitive predictions that have been confirmed by empirical observation. Bacterial adaptation to drugs, for example, is well understood in terms of evolutionary theory.

An example of a hypothesis born of a social psychology theory is the prediction that when people work hard to acquire something (a consumer product, a new job, or admission to an exclusive club) and it turns out to be disappointing, they will be motivated to find hidden benefits in what they acquired. Such a hypothesis, which can be tested in a variety of ways, is an example of the sort of hypotheses that are generated by *dissonance theory*, the theory that people like their thoughts to be consistent with one another and with their actions and will do substantial mental work to achieve such cognitive consistency. Hypotheses are tested by studies, which examine predictions about what will happen in particular concrete contexts. Thus, theories are more general than hypotheses, which are in turn more general than the specific findings derived from the studies designed to test them.

Observational Research

> “Science and everyday life cannot and should not be separated.”
>
> —ROSALIND FRANKLIN, BRITISH CHEMIST

The first step in scientific research is often just to look at a phenomenon in a systematic way, with a view to understanding what’s going on, and coming up with hypotheses about why things are the way they are. Charles Darwin was first and foremost a great observer of natural life, and his observations of finches in the Galápagos Islands, as well as all manner of other species during his five and a half years on the *Beagle*, led to his theory of evolution by natural selection.

Social psychologists likewise learn a great deal from observation. One such method of research, used by both psychologists and cultural anthropologists, is called *participant observation* and involves observing some phenomenon at close range. An anthropologist may live with a group of people for a long time in order to note what they do and come up with guesses—sometimes inspired by conversations with the people being studied—about why those people behave in certain ways or have certain beliefs.

OBSERVATIONAL METHODS The evolutionary psychologist and human behavioral ecologist Lawrence Sugiyama is shown here, with bow and arrow, involved in a particularly active form of participant observation.

In the 1950s, social psychologists Roger Barker and Herbert Wright (1954) studied how children in a U.S. Midwestern town interacted with their surroundings. They followed children around as they delivered the morning paper, went to school, played kick the can, did their homework, and went to church suppers. The study revealed a great deal about the way the children dealt with their environment, the opportunities and constraints that came with their environment, and the factors that might have molded their characters.

Social psychologists often observe social situations in a semiformal way, taking notes and interviewing participants.

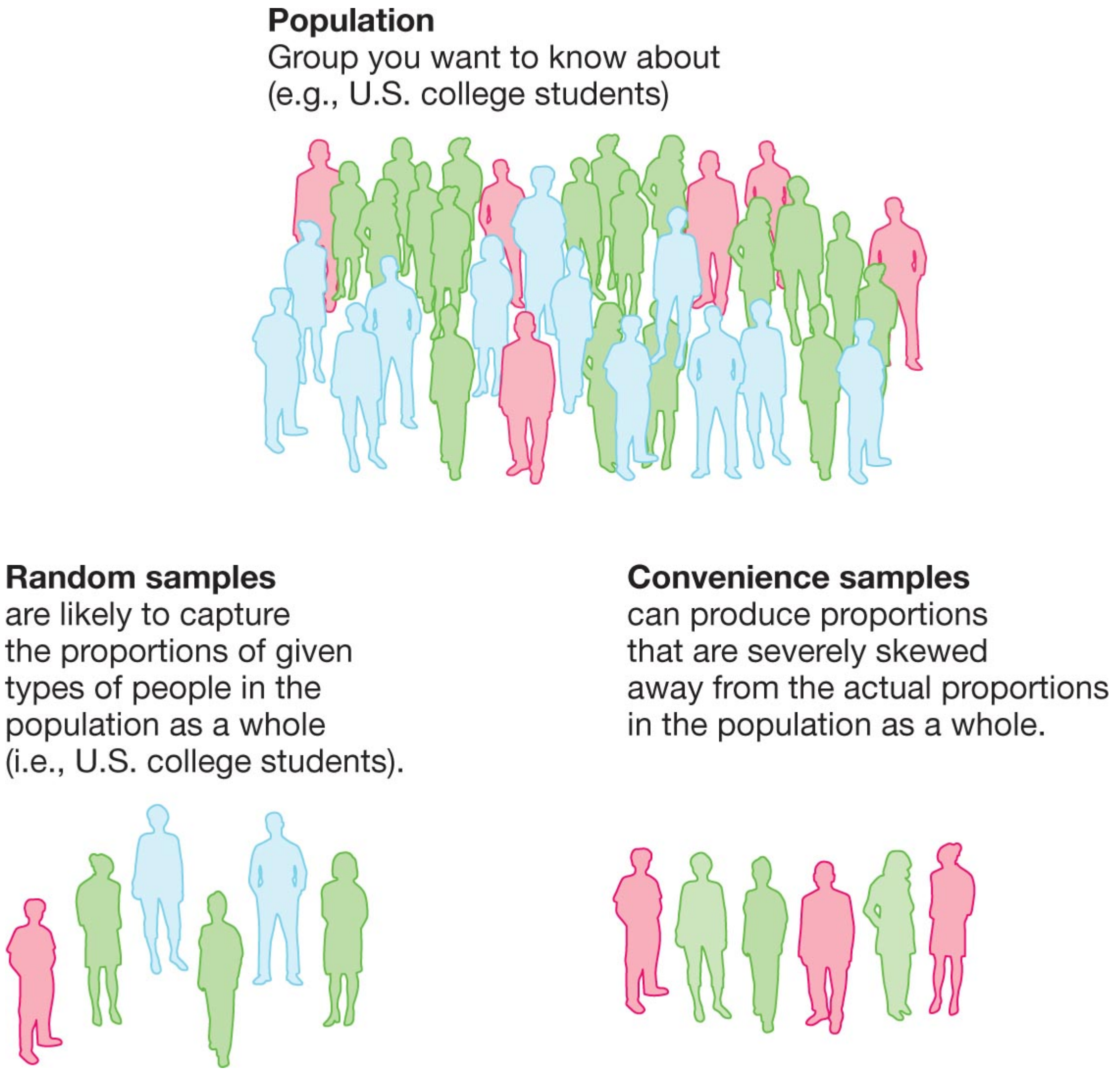
Observations can be misleading, however, so any tentative conclusions gleaned from observational research should ideally be tested using other methods.

Archival Research

One type of research can be conducted without ever leaving the library or one’s computer. Researchers may look at evidence found in *archives* of various kinds, including census reports, police records, sports statistics, newspaper articles, and databases containing ethnographic (anthropological) descriptions of people in different cultures. For example, for their research on cultures of honor, Nisbett (1993) and his colleagues studied FBI reports of homicides and found, as they had anticipated, that homicides were more common in the U.S. South than in the North. The FBI reports also included the circumstances of the homicides—specifically, murders committed in the context of another felony (such as while robbing a convenience store) versus murders that were crimes of passion (such as in the context of a love triangle). These classifications enabled Nisbett and Cohen (1996) to analyze the various types of murders and to discover that homicides involving some type of insult—for example, barroom quarrels and cases of sexual infidelity—were much more common in the South than in the North. Indeed, homicides not involving personal honor are actually *less* common in the South, leading a Southern sociologist (Reed, 1981) to say that you’re safer in the South than in the North if you stay out of the wrong bars and bedrooms!

Surveys

One of the most common types of study in social psychology involves simply asking people questions. *Surveys* can be conducted using either interviews or written questionnaires. The participants may be a small collection of students or a large sample of the national population. When the investigator is trying to discern the beliefs or attitudes of some group of people—freshmen at a particular university, say, or Guatemalans living in Canada—the people in the survey must be representative of the target population as a whole. Obtaining a representative sample is best achieved by selecting potential respondents randomly. The only way to obtain a random sample is to give everyone in the population an equal chance of being chosen. If the university has a directory of students, a random sample can be obtained by finding out the total number of freshmen (say, 1,000), deciding how many to interview (say, 50), and then asking every twentieth person in the directory to participate in the survey (**Figure 2.1**). (Such a sample isn't technically random because the directory is likely to be organized alphabetically and every twentieth name is chosen systematically rather than randomly. But the procedure is a reasonable approximation of random selection because there's unlikely to be anything systematically associated with every twentieth name.)



Population
Group you want to know about
(e.g., U.S. college students)

Random samples
are likely to capture
the proportions of given
types of people in the
population as a whole
(i.e., U.S. college students).

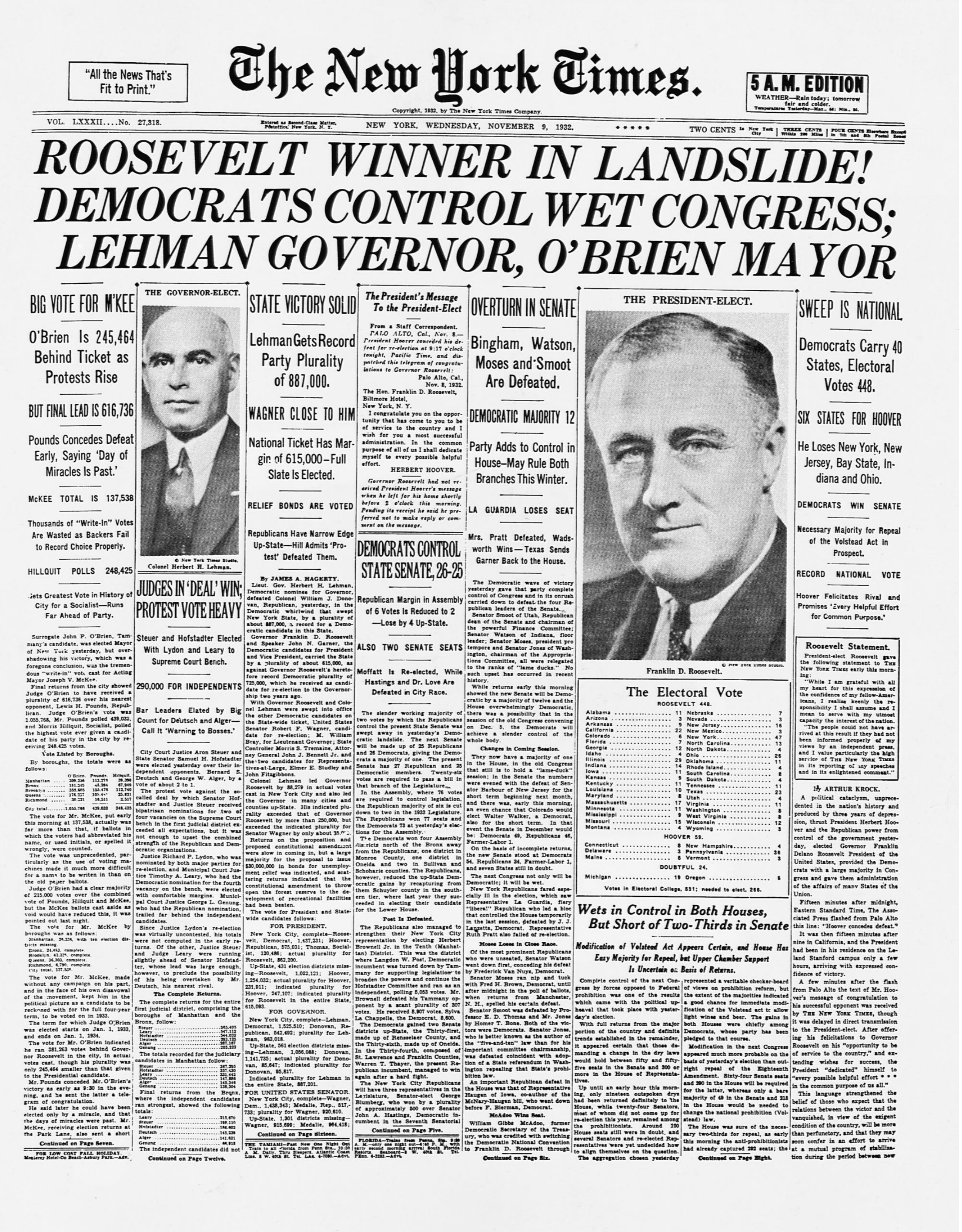
Convenience samples
can produce proportions
that are severely skewed
away from the actual proportions
in the population as a whole.

FIGURE 2.1 RANDOM SAMPLING AND CONVENIENCE SAMPLING

Convenience sampling, such as contacting people as they enter the library or emailing fraternity and sorority members, is not random. A convenience sample may be *biased* in some way; that is, it might include too many of some kinds of people and too few of others. Information gathered from biased samples is sometimes worse than no information at all. One famous example from the history of public opinion polling comes from a survey conducted by the *Literary Digest* that involved more than a million (!) respondents. The *Literary Digest* erroneously predicted that the Republican Alf Landon would defeat the Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the

1936 U.S. presidential election. In fact, the election was one of the most dramatic landslides in history: Landon won only two states. How could the survey have been so far off? The sample was biased because it was drawn from telephone directories and automobile registrations. In 1936, wealthy people were more likely to own phones and cars than were poorer people, and they were also more likely to vote Republican.

You've undoubtedly seen the results of reader surveys in various magazines. Two-thirds of *People* magazine readers who went on a vegan diet say they lost weight. Three-quarters of the readers of *Outside* magazine say that sex is more enjoyable outdoors. Sixty percent of respondents in a *Slate* poll claim they are happier after going to church than if they stay home and watch a football game on Sunday. Actually, all three results are fictitious, and you should ignore each claim. In fact, you should ignore all claims like these, even if they aren't made up, because the people who take the time to respond to such polls are likely to be different from those who do not respond and therefore are unlikely to represent the population as a whole. For example, readers of *People* who have lost weight may be more likely than those who haven't lost weight to respond to a survey about weight loss. The criterion that everyone be equally likely to be included in the sample is clearly not met, upping the odds that the survey results are misleading.



"All the News That's Fit to Print."

The New York Times.

5 A.M. EDITION
WEATHER—Rain today; tomorrow fair and colder.
Temperatures Yesterday—Max., 56; Min., 46.

Copyright, 1932, by The New York Times Company.

VOL. LXXXII....No. 27,318. Entered as Second-Class Matter, Postoffice, New York, N. Y. NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 1932. * * * * * TWO CENTS In New York City | THREE CENTS Within 200 Miles | FOUR CENTS Elsewhere Except in 7th and 8th Postal Zones

ROOSEVELT WINNER IN LANDSLIDE! DEMOCRATS CONTROL WET CONGRESS; LEHMAN GOVERNOR, O'BRIEN MAYOR

BIG VOTE FOR M'KEE

O'Brien Is 245,464 Behind Ticket as Protests Rise

BUT FINAL LEAD IS 616,736

Pounds Concedes Defeat Early, Saying 'Day of Miracles Is Past.'

McKEE TOTAL IS 137,538

Thousands of "Write-In" Votes Are Wasted as Backers Fail to Record Choice Properly.

HILLQUIT POLLS 248,425

Gets Greatest Vote in History of City for a Socialist—Runs Far Ahead of Party.

Surrogate John P. O'Brien, Tammany's candidate, was elected Mayor of New York yesterday, but overshadowing his victory, which was a foregone conclusion, was the tremendous "write-in" vote cast for Acting Mayor Joseph V. McKee.

Final returns from the city showed Judge O'Brien to have received a plurality of 616,736 over his nearest opponent, Lewis H. Pounds, Republican. Judge O'Brien's vote was 1.055.768, Mr. Pounds polled 439,032, and Morris Hillquit, Socialist, polled the highest vote ever given a candidate of his party in the city by receiving 248.425 votes.

Vote Listed by Boroughs.

By boroughs, the totals were as follows:

	O'Brien.	Pounds.	Hillquit.
Manhattan	309.256	113.278	39.398
Bronx	161.345	46.284	67.949
Brooklyn	358.605	155.478	112.740
Queens	176.237	105.4[illegible]	25.821
Richmond	30.321	16.511	2.517
City total	1.055.768	439.032	248.425

The vote for Mr. McKee, put early this morning at 137,538, actually was far more than that, if ballots in which the voters had abbreviated his name, or used initials, or spelled it wrongly, were counted.

The vote was unprecedented, particularly as the use of voting machines made it much more difficult for a name to be writen in than on the old paper ballots.

Judge O'Brien had a clear majority of 215.000 votes over the combined vote of Pounds, Hillquit and McKee, but the McKee ballots cast aside as void would have reduced this, it was pointed out last night.

The vote for Mr. McKee by boroughs was as follows:

Manhattan, 26,336, with ten election districts missing.
Bronx, 21,453, complete.
Brooklyn, 43,328, complete.
Queens, 36,303, complete.
Richmond, 6,790, complete.
City total, 137,538.

The vote for Mr. McKee, made without any campaign on his part, and in the face of his own disavowal of the movement, kept him in the political picture as a candidate to be reckoned with for the full four-year term, to be voted on in 1933.

The term for which Judge O'Brien was elected starts on Jan. 1, 1933, and ends on Jan. 1, 1934.

The vote for Mr. O'Brien indicated he ran 381,263 votes behind Governor Roosevelt in the city, in actual votes cast, though his plurality was only 245,464 smaller than that given to the Presidential candidate.

Mr. Pounds conceded Mr. O'Brien's victory as early as 9:30 in the evening, and he sent the latter a telegram of congratulation.

He said later he could have been elected only by a miracle, and that the days of miracles were past. Mr. McKee, receiving election returns at the Park Lane, also sent a short

Continued on Page Seven.

FOR LOW COST FALL HOLIDAY. Monterey Hotel-On Beach-Asbury Park.—Adv.

THE GOVERNOR-ELECT.

© New York Times Studio.
Colonel Herbert H. Lehman.

JUDGES IN 'DEAL' WIN; PROTEST VOTE HEAVY

Steuer and Hofstadter Elected With Lydon and Leary to Supreme Court Bench.

290,000 FOR INDEPENDENTS

Bar Leaders Elated by Big Count for Deutsch and Alger—Call It 'Warning to Bosses.'

City Court Justice Aron Steuer and State Senator Samuel H. Hofstadter were elected yesterday over their independent opponents, Bernard S. Deutsch and George W. Alger, by a vote of about 2 to 1.

The protest vote against the so-called deal by which Senator Hofstadter and Justice Steuer received bipatrisan nominations for two of four vacancies on the Supreme Court bench in the first judicial district exceeded all expectations, but it was not enough to upset the combined strength of the Republican and Democratic organizations.

Justice Richard P. Lydon, who was nominated by both major parties for re-election, and Municipal Court Justice Timothy A. Leary, who had the Democratic nomination for the fourth vacancy on the bench, were elected with comfortable margins. Municipal Court Justice George L. Genung, who had the Republican nomination, trailed far behind the independent candidates.

Since Justice Lydon's re-election was virtually uncontested, his totals were not computed in the early returns. Of the other, Justice Steuer and Judge Leary were running slightly ahead of Senator Hofstadter, whose lead was large enough, however, to preclude the possibility of his being overtaken by Mr. Deutsch, his nearest rival.

The Complete Returns.

The complete returns for the entire first judicial district, comprising the boroughs of Manhattan and the Bronx, follow:

Steuer	565,405
Leary	547,112
Hofstadter	544,032
Deutsch	293,125
Alger	287,167
Genung	205,222

The totals recorded for the judiciary candidates in Manhattan follow:

Steuer	367,295
Hofstadter	357,430
Leary	331,442
Deutsch	147,886
Alger	145,346
Genung	138,304

Final returns from the Bronx, where the independent candidates ran strongest, showed the following totals:

Leary	215,670
Steuer	198,110
Hofstadter	186,602
Deutsch	145,239
Alger	141,821
Genung	66,918

The independent candidates did not

Continued on Page Twelve.

STATE VICTORY SOLID

Lehman Gets Record Party Plurality of 887,000.

WAGNER CLOSE TO HIM

National Ticket Has Margin of 615,000—Full Slate Is Elected.

RELIEF BONDS ARE VOTED

Republicans Have Narrow Edge Up-State—Hill Admits 'Protest' Defeated Them.

By JAMES A. HAGERTY.

Lieut. Gov. Herbert H. Lehman, Democratic nominee for Governor, defeated Colonel William J. Donovan, Republican, yesterday, in the Democratic whirlwind that swept New York State, by a plurality of about 887,000, a record for a Democratic candidate in this State.

Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt and Speaker John N. Garner, the Democratic candidates for President and Vice President, carried the State by a plurality of about 615,000, as against Governor Roosevelt's heretofore record Democratic plurality of 725,000, which he received as candidate for re-election to the Governorship two years ago.

With Governor Roosevelt and Colonel Lehman were swept into office the other Democratic candidates on the State-wide ticket, United States Senator Robert F. Wagner, candidate for re-election; M. William Bray, for Lieutenant Governor; State Controller Morris S. Tremaine, Attorney General John J. Bennett Jr. and the two candidates for Representatives-at-Large, Elmer E. Studley and John Fitzgibbons.

Colonel Lehman led Governor Roosevelt by 88,279 in actual votes cast in New York City and also led the Governor in many cities and counties up-State. His indicated plurality exceeded that of Governor Roosevelt by more than 250,000, but exceeded the indicated plurality for Senator Wagner by only about 35,0[illegible].

Returns on the proposition and proposed constitutional amendment were slow in coming in, but a large majority for the proposal to issue $30,000,000 in bonds for unemployment relief was indicated, and scattering returns indicated that the constitutional amendment to throw open the forest reserve to the development of recreational facilities had been beaten.

The vote for President and State-wide candidates follows:

FOR PRESIDENT.

New York City, complete—Roosevelt, Democrat, 1,437,231; Hoover, Republican, 575,031; Thomas, Socialist, 120,486; actual plurality for Roosevelt, 862,200.

Up-State, 431 election districts missing—Roosevelt, 1,022,121; Hoover, 1,254,032; actual plurality for Hoover, 231,911; indicated plurality for Hoover, 247,107; indicated plurality for Roosevelt in the entire State, 615,093.

FOR GOVERNOR.

New York City, complete—Lehman, Democrat, 1,525,510; Donovan, Republican, 542,492; plurality for Lehman, 983,018.

Up-State, 561 election districts missing—Lehman, 1,056,088; Donovan, 1,141,735; actual plurality for Donovan, 85,647; indicated plurality for Donovan, 95,817.

Indicated plurality for Lehman in the entire State, 887,201.

FOR UNITED STATES SENATOR.

New York City, complete—Wagner, Dem., 1,438,343; Medalie, Rep., 517,733; plurality for Wagner, 920,610.

Up-State, 1,301 districts missing—Wagner, 915,699; Medalie, 964,418;

Continued on Page Sixteen.

THE TAMIAMI—Fast New One Night Out Train to all Florida from Penn Sta., 10:30 A. M. Daily. Thru Sleepers. Atlantic Coast Line. 8 W. 40th St. Tel. LAc. 4-7080.—Advt.

The President's Message To the President-Elect

From a Staff Correspondent.

PALO ALTO, Cal., Nov. 8.—President Hoover conceded his defeat for re-election at 9:17 o'clock tonight, Pacific Time, and dispatched this telegram of congratulations to Governor Roosevelt:

Palo Alto, Cal.,
Nov. 8, 1932.

The Hon. Franklin D. Roosevelt,
Biltmore Hotel,
New York, N. Y.

I congratulate you on the opportunity that has come to you to be of service to the country and I wish for you a most successful administration. In the common purpose of all of us I shall dedicate myself to every possible helpful effort.

HERBERT HOOVER.

Governor Roosevelt had not received President Hoover's message when he left for his home shortly before 2 o'clock this morning. Pending its receipt he said he preferred not to make reply or comment on the message.

DEMOCRATS CONTROL STATE SENATE, 26-25

Republican Margin in Assembly of 6 Votes Is Reduced to 2 —Lose by 4 Up-State.

ALSO TWO SENATE SEATS

Moffatt Is Re-elected, While Hastings and Dr. Love Are Defeated in City Race.

The slender working majority of two votes by which the Republicans control the present State Senate was swept away in yesterday's Democratic landslide. The next Senate will be made up of 25 Republicans and 26 Democrats, giving the Democrats a majority of one. The present Senate has 27 Republican and 25 Democratic members. Twenty-six votes are required to pass a bill in that branch of the Legislature.

In the Assembly, where 76 votes are required to control legislation, the Republican majority of six is cut down to two in the 1933 Legislature. The Republicans won 77 seats and the Democrats 73 at yesterday's elections for the Assembly.

The Democrats won four Assembly districts north of the Bronx away from the Republicans, one district in Monroe County, one district in Oneida and two in Sullivan and Schoharie counties. The Republicans, however, reduced the up-State Democratic gains by recapturing from them Schuyler county in the southern tier, where last year they succeeded in electing their candidate for the Lower House.

Post Is Defeated.

The Republicans also managed to strengthen their New York City representation by electing Herbert Brownell Jr. in the Tenth (Manhattan) District. This was the district where Langdon W. Post, Democratic incumbent was turned down by Tammany for supporting legislation to broaden the powers and continue the Hofstadter Committee and ran as an independent, polling 5,053 votes. Mr. Brownell defeated his Tammany opponent by a scant plurality of 307 votes. He received 8,907 votes, Sylva La Chappelle, the Democrat, 8,600.

The Democrats gained two Senate districts up-State, the Thirty-first, made up of Rensselaer County, and the Thirty-sixth, made up of Oneida. In the Thirty-fourth, composed of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties, Warren T. Thayer, the present Republican incumbent, managed to win again after a hard fight.

The New York City Republicans will have three representatives in the Legislature, Senator-elect George Blumberg, who won by a plurality of approximately 500 over Senator John A. Hastings, Democratic incumbent in the Seventh Senatorial

Continued on Page Five.

FLORIDA—Trains from Penna. Sta. 9:30 A. M.—only one night out—6:40 P. M., with early second morning arrival South Florida Resorts. Seaboard—8 W. 40th St. Tel. PEnn. 6-3282.—Advt.

OVERTURN IN SENATE

Bingham, Watson, Moses and Smoot Are Defeated.

DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY 12

Party Adds to Control in House—May Rule Both Branches This Winter.

LA GUARDIA LOSES SEAT

Mrs. Pratt Defeated, Wadsworth Wins—Texas Sends Garner Back to the House.

The Democratic wave of victory yesterday gave that party complete control of Congress and in its onrush carried down to defeat the four Republican leaders of the Senate.

Senator Smoot of Utah, Republican dean of the Senate and chairman of the powerful Finance Committee; Senator Watson of Indiana, floor leader; Senator Moses, president pro tempore and Senator Jones of Washington, chairman of the Appropriations Committee, all were relegated to the ranks of "lame ducks." No such upset has occurred in recent history.

While returns early this morning showed the new Senate will be Democratic by a majority of twelve and the House overwhelmingly Democratic, there was a possibility that in the session of the old Congress convening on Dec. 5, the Democrats will achieve a slender control of the whole body.

Changes in Coming Session.

They now have a majority of one in the House, in the old Congress that still is to hold a "lame-duck" session; in the Senate the numbers were evened with the defeat of Senator Barbour of New Jersey for the short term beginning next month, and there was, early this morning, an even chance that Colorado would elect Walter Walker, a Democrat, also for the short term. In that event the Senate in December would be: Democrats 49, Republicans 46, Farmer-Labor 1.

On the basis of incomplete returns, the new Senate stood at Democrats 54, Republicans 34, Farmer-Labor 1, and seven States still in doubt.

The next Congress not only will be Democratic; it will be wet.

New York Republicans fared especially ill in the election, which saw Representative La Guardia, fiery "liberal" Republican who led a bloc that controlled the House temporarily in the last session, defeated by J. J. Lanzetta, Democrat. Representative Ruth Pratt also failed of re-election.

Moses Loses in Close Race.

Of the most prominent Republicans who were unseated, Senator Watson went down first, conceding his defeat by Frederick Van Nuys, Democrat.

Senator Moses ran nip and tuck with Fred H. Brown, Democrat, until after midnight in the poll of ballots, when returns from Manchester, N. H., spelled his certain defeat.

Senator Smoot was defeated by Professor E. D. Thomas and Mr. Jones by Homer T. Bone. Both of the victors were Democrats. Senator Jones, who is better known as the author of the "five-and-ten" law than for his important committee chairmanship, was defeated coincident with adoption of a State referendum in Washington repealing that State's prohibition law.

An important Republican defeat in the House was that of Representative Haugen of Iowa, co-author of the McNary-Haugen bill, who went down before F. Bierman, Democrat.

McAdoo Wins Seat.

William Gibbs McAdoo, former Democratic Secretary of the Treasury, who was credited with switching the Democratic National Convention to Franklin D. Roosevelt through

Continued on Page Six.

THE PRESIDENT-ELECT.

© New York Times Studio.
Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The Electoral Vote

ROOSEVELT 448.

Alabama	11	Nebraska	7
Arizona	3	Nevada	3
Arkansas	9	New Jersey	16
California	22	New Mexico	3
Colorado	6	New York	47
Florida	7	North Carolina	13
Georgia	12	North Dakota	4
Idaho	4	Ohio	26
Illinois	29	Oklahoma	11
Indiana	14	Rhode Island	4
Iowa	11	South Carolina	8
Kansas	9	South Dakota	4
Kentucky	11	Tennessee	11
Louisiana	10	Texas	23
Maryland	8	Utah	4
Massachusetts	17	Virginia	11
Minnesota	11	Washington	8
Mississippi	9	West Virginia	8
Missouri	15	Wisconsin	12
Montana	4	Wyoming	3
HOOVER 59.			
Connecticut	8	New Hampshire	4
Delaware	3	Pennsylvania	36
Maine	5	Vermont	3
DOUBTFUL 24.			
Michigan	19	Oregon	5

Votes in Electoral College, 531; needed to elect, 266.

Wets in Control in Both Houses, But Short of Two-Thirds in Senate

Modification of Volstead Act Appears Certain, and House Has Easy Majority for Repeal, but Upper Chamber Support Is Uncertain on Basis of Returns.

Complete control of the next Congress by forces opposed to Federal prohibition was one of the results which came with the political upheaval that took place with yesterday's election.

With full returns from the major portion of the country and definite trends established in the remainder, it appeared certain that those demanding a change in the dry laws would hold between fifty and fifty-five seats in the Senate and 300 or more in the House of Representatives.

Up until an early hour this morning, only nineteen outspoken drys had been returned definitely to the House, while twenty-four Senators, most of whom did not come up for re-election this year, remained among the prohibitionists. Around 100 House seats still were in doubt, and several Senators and re-elected Representatives were yet undecided how to align themselves on the question.

The aggregation chosen yesterday represented a veritable checker-board of views on prohibition reform, but the extent of the majorities indicated a good chance for immediate modification of the Volstead act to allow light wines and beer. The gains in both Houses were chiefly among Democrats, whose party has been pledged to that course.

Modification in the next Congress appeared much more probable on the basis of yesterday's election than outright repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. Sixty-four Senate seats and 290 in the House will be required for the latter, whereas only a bare majority of 49 in the Senate and 218 in the House would be needed to change the national prohibition (Volstead) law.

The House was sure of the necessary two-thirds for repeal, as early this morning the anti-prohibitionists had already captured 292 seats; the

Continued on Page Eight.

SWEEP IS NATIONAL

Democrats Carry 40 States, Electoral Votes 448.

SIX STATES FOR HOOVER

He Loses New York, New Jersey, Bay State, Indiana and Ohio.

DEMOCRATS WIN SENATE

Necessary Majority for Repeal of the Volstead Act in Prospect.

RECORD NATIONAL VOTE

Hoover Felicitates Rival and Promises 'Every Helpful Effort for Common Purpose.'

Roosevelt Statement.

President-elect Roosevelt gave the following statement to THE NEW YORK TIMES early this morning:

"While I am grateful with all my heart for this expression of the confidence of my fellow-Americans, I realize keenly the responsibility I shall assume and I mean to serve with my utmost capacity the interest of the nation.

"The people could not have arrived at this result if they had not been informed properly of my views by an independent press, and I value particularly the high service of THE NEW YORK TIMES in its reporting of my speeches and in its enlightened comment."

By ARTHUR KROCK.

A political cataclysm, unprecedented in the nation's history and produced by three years of depression, thrust President Herbert Hoover and the Republican power from control of the government yesterday, elected Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt President of the United States, provided the Democrats with a large majority in Congress and gave them administration of the affairs of many States of the Union.

Fifteen minutes after midnight, Eastern Standard Time, The Associated Press flashed from Palo Alto this line: "Hoover concedes defeat."

It was then fifteen minutes after nine in California, and the President had been in his residence on the Leland Stanford campus only a few hours, arriving with expressed confidence of victory.

A few minutes after the flash from Palo Alto the text of Mr. Hoover's message of congratulation to his successful opponent was received by THE NEW YORK TIMES, though it was delayed in direct transmission to the President-elect. After offering his felicitations to Governor Roosevelt on his "opportunity to be of service to the country," and extending wishes for success, the President "dedicated" himself to "every possible helpful effort * * * in the common purpose of us all."

This language strengthened the belief of those who expect that the relations between the victor and the vanquished, in view of the exigent condition of the country, will be more than perfunctory, and that they may soon confer in an effort to arrive at a mutual program of stabilization during the period between new

PROBLEMS WITH CONVENIENCE SAMPLES Convenience sampling can produce results that are wide of the mark. The largest poll of the 1936 presidential election predicted that Alf Landon would be the winner.

Nisbett and Cohen (1996) used surveys to try to find out why U.S. Southerners were more likely to commit homicide. One possibility was that Southerners are simply more accepting of violence. But when the investigators looked at published national surveys of attitudes toward violence, they found few regional differences. For example, Southerners were no more likely than Northerners to agree with the sentiment that “an eye for an eye” justifies retaliation, and Southerners were actually more likely to agree that “when a person harms you, you should turn the other cheek and forgive him.” However, the researchers found that Southerners were more likely to endorse violence in response to insults and to think that a man would be justified in fighting an acquaintance who “looks over his girlfriend and talks to her in a suggestive way.” Southerners were also more likely to approve of violence in response to threats to home and family, thinking, for example, that “a man has a right to kill a person to defend his house.” In addition, the investigators found that Southerners were more approving of violence in socializing children: They were more likely to say that spanking was a reasonable way to handle a child’s misdeeds and that they would encourage their children to fight someone who was bullying them.

In trying to explain this acceptance of violence in specific contexts, Nisbett and Cohen sought out anthropologists and historians. Several sources suggested that the South might have a “culture of honor.” The U.S. North was settled by farmers from England, Holland, and Germany. Farmers in general are peace-loving folks; there’s little reason for them not to be. The U.S. South was settled by herding peoples from the edges of Great Britain—Scottish, Irish, and Scotch-Irish from Ulster. Herding peoples throughout the world tend to be sensitive to slights and prone to aggression when insulted. They need to be vigilant because they can lose their livelihood—their herd—in an instant. They cultivate a stance of being ready to commit violence at the merest hint that they might not be able to protect themselves, their homes, and their property. A man has to retaliate violently if insulted in order to establish that he is not to be trifled with. Parents teach their children not to fear violence and to protect themselves. This historical hypothesis guided the rest of Nisbett and Cohen’s research.

In addition to its roots in the fringes of Britain, herding has traditionally been much more common in the Mediterranean countries than in northern Europe, and those countries in general have always had cultures of honor. (The Corsican Napoleon Bonaparte and the Sicilian Mafia are examples.) In Greek mythology (or perhaps in Greek history, we don’t really know), Paris of Troy took beautiful Helen from her husband, Menelaus of Sparta, provoking a war of ten years’ duration. “The face that launched a thousand ships” likely wouldn’t have caused so many northern European vessels to set sail.

Correlational Research

One of the most important distinctions among different types of research is that between correlational research and experimental research. In correlational research, psychologists measure two or more variables and examine whether they are related. Experimental research goes a step further, enabling investigators to make strong inferences about *why* a relationship exists or how different situations affect people’s behavior.

CORRELATION DOES NOT ESTABLISH CAUSATION Looking for correlations can be a valuable way to begin a line of inquiry. However, once established, a correlation requires further exploration. Does variable 1 causally influence variable 2, or is it the other way around—reverse causation?

Or does some third variable influence both? In correlational research, we can never be sure about causality.

For example, *U.S. News and World Report* reported in 2013 that casual sex worsens college students' mental health. The article reported that students who have more casual sexual encounters tend to have poorer mental health than those who have fewer such encounters. But casual sex might be associated with loneliness, and we know that lonelier people have poorer mental health than people who don't report that they're lonely. So a third variable—loneliness—might be causing students to engage in more casual sex and might worsen their mental health. In that case, casual sex might not in fact be causing poorer mental health; rather, a third variable is causing both. It's even possible that the causal direction runs the opposite way from what the headline suggests: Poorer mental health may cause people to seek out casual sex as a way of feeling less unhappy.

Correlational research usually can't provide convincing evidence of a causal relationship because of the possibility of self-selection; that is, the investigator has no control over any particular participant's level, or score, on a given variable—for example, whether the participant grew up in poverty or opulence, has an IQ of 100 or 130, or follows the teachings of Jesus, Muhammad, or Buddha. In effect, the participants have "chosen" their level on *all* variables—those that are measured and those that aren't. For example, the study finding that casual sex was associated with poorer mental health didn't assign people to have casual sex or not. And the researchers didn't know what other qualities participants had in addition to their sexual proclivities—a sunny or gloomy disposition, good or bad physical health, a stressful or relaxing living situation. These and other qualities might have been the true cause of poorer mental health.

In correlational research, investigators can look at only the degree of relationship between two or more variables. The strength of a relationship between variables can range from 0, meaning that the variables have no relationship at all, to 1 (or +1), meaning that the higher the level on one variable, the higher the level on the other—without exception. (If being higher on one variable is perfectly associated with being lower on the other, the correlation is −1.) By convention, a correlation of .1 indicates a weak relationship, a correlation of .3 a moderate relationship, and a correlation of .5 or higher a strong relationship. **Figure 2.2** shows what are called scatterplots. Variable 1 is on the *x*-axis (horizontal), and variable 2 is on the *y*-axis (vertical). Each dot represents a study participant for whom there is a score on both variables: a score on variable 1 and a score on variable 2. Panel A shows a perfect negative correlation: The higher the level on variable 1, the lower the level on variable 2, without exception. Panel E shows a perfect positive correlation: The higher the level on variable 1, the higher the level on variable 2, without exception.

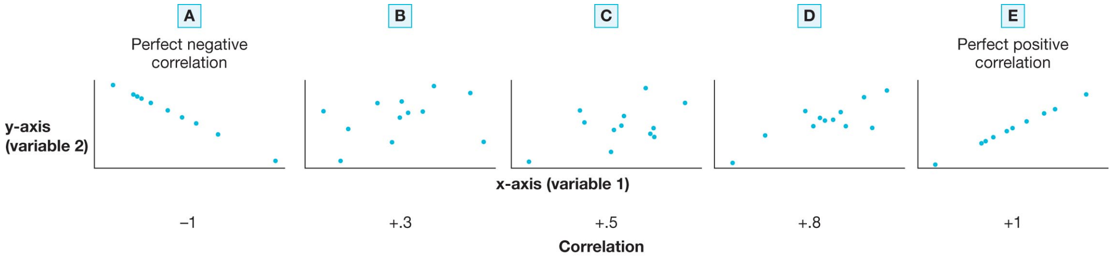


FIGURE 2.2 **SCATTERPLOTS AND CORRELATIONS**

Panel B in Figure 2.2 shows a correlation of .3—a moderate relationship between the two variables—which could correspond, for example, to the correlation between a person’s percentage of body fat and degree of risk for cardiovascular illness. Both the marked spread of the dots (their scatter) and their relatively shallow slope show that the association is relatively weak.

Panel C in Figure 2.2 shows a correlation of .5—a strong relationship—which is approximately the degree of association between height and weight. Panel D in Figure 2.2 shows a correlation of .8—a very strong relationship. This is about the degree of correlation between a person’s score on the math portion of the SAT on a first testing occasion and the same person’s score a year later. Whether strong or weak, correlations establish only that there is an association between variables, not that one variable exerts a causal influence on the other.

Scientific findings reported in the media are often based on correlational research. It’s crucial to recognize the limits of such findings. They’re often interesting, and they might *suggest* a particular causal connection, but by no means can correlational studies establish causation. To further develop your critical thinking abilities, try your hand at interpreting the correlational results in Box 2.2.

THE VALUE OF CORRELATIONAL FINDINGS Correlational studies can point investigators to possible causal hypotheses about some aspect of the world. Moreover, correlational studies are sometimes a researcher’s best option when an experimental study would be difficult or unethical to conduct. Unfortunately, even if it seems possible that a causal relationship exists, correlational studies don’t normally indicate which variable may be causing the other, nor do they reveal whether some third variable is at work driving the association between the two variables being studied. Consider the following example: People who watch the local evening news—with reports of murders, fires, and other newsworthy mayhem—see more danger in the world than people who don’t. The most obvious explanation is that seeing dangers on TV makes people feel more at risk. But could it be that people who are already anxious watch the local news to justify their fearfulness? Or is there some third variable at play? For example, elderly people may have more anxiety about their lives and may have more time to watch TV. This study could be refined so that it potentially rules out the latter hypothesis by showing that older adults are not more likely to watch TV than younger people are, nor do they tend to be more anxious about their lives than younger people do. But ruling out an alternative hypothesis isn’t normally sufficient to prove that a given relationship is causal. As more and more alternative explanations are tested and rejected, however, it becomes more and more plausible that the hypothesized causal relationship is indeed correct.

BOX 2.2

Not So Fast: **Critical Thinking about Correlation and Causation**

The following items are the findings of various correlational studies for which scientists or the media have implied a causal connection. To be a good consumer of correlational research, you need to be able to evaluate such causal claims carefully. For each of the findings in the list, consider alternatives to the stated or implied causal relationship—namely, that A causes B. Might it actually be the case that B causes A? Or that some variable C causes both?

1. *TIME Magazine* reported that attempts by parents to control the size of the portions their children

eat will cause the children to become overweight (June 23, 2008, p. 102). If the parents of overweight children stop controlling their portions, will the children get thinner?

2. Countries whose citizens have higher average IQs have higher average wealth. Does being smarter make a country richer?
3. People who attend church have lower mortality rates than those who do not (Schnall et al., 2010). Does religion make people live longer?
4. People who have a dog are less likely to be depressed. If you give a dog to a depressed person, is the person likely to become happier?
5. States with abstinence-only sex education have higher homicide rates. Does abstinence-only sex education cause aggression? If students in those states receive more informative sex education, will the homicide rate go down?
6. Intelligent men have better sperm, meaning higher sperm count and greater motility (Arden et al., 2008). Does this suggest that attending college, which makes people smarter, is likely to improve sperm quality?
7. People who smoke marijuana are subsequently more likely to use cocaine than people who do not smoke marijuana. Does marijuana use cause cocaine use?

LONGITUDINAL STUDIES Jackie, Sue, and Lynn (above) are three participants in *Up*, a series of documentary films by Michael Apted tracing the development of 14 British people from various socioeconomic backgrounds. New material for this longitudinal study has been collected every seven years since 1964, starting when the participants were 7 years old.

Some insight into the nature and meaning of a correlational result can be obtained by conducting a longitudinal study, which involves collecting measures at different points in time from the same participants. For example, an investigator might measure how many hours teenagers devote each week to playing violent video games and then examine the same participants' incarceration rates and other measures of criminal behavior in adulthood. A correlation between video game use in adolescence and criminality in adulthood cannot establish that playing such games leads to a life of crime—there may be a hidden third variable that's responsible for the relationship. But it does rule out one direction of causality: Nothing that happens when a person is 30 can affect anything the person did when they were younger.

Experimental Research

The best way to be sure about causality is to conduct an experiment. Experimental research requires an independent variable, which the scientist manipulates, and a dependent variable. The independent variable is presumed to be the cause of some particular outcome called the dependent variable, which is measured. In experiments, the researcher determines what the independent variable and the levels of that variable will be. Dependent variables can be measured in many ways, including verbal reports (such as statements about degree of anger or anxiety), behavior (helping or not, getting an inoculation or not), physiological measures (heart rate or stress monitoring, such as cortisol levels), or neural measures (increased activity in certain brain areas). In an experiment testing the effectiveness of a new vaccine, the independent variable is whether the person was assigned to receive a vaccine or a placebo. So one level of the independent variable is "receives vaccine," and the other level of the independent variable is "receives placebo." The condition in which the person receives the vaccine is the *experimental condition.* The condition in which the person receives the placebo is the control condition, which is comparable to the experimental condition in every way except that it lacks the one ingredient hypothesized to produce the expected effect on the dependent variable. The dependent variable might be whether or not the person gets the illness the vaccine was intended to prevent, how ill the person becomes, or whether or not the person requires hospitalization or dies.

HONOR EXPERIMENTS Researchers had U.S. Southern and Northern male students walk down a hallway where an accomplice shoved each student and called him an asshole. Southern students responded with more anger as well as increased testosterone levels (Cohen et al., 1996).

The great power of experiments comes from exposing participants to different levels of the independent variable by random assignment, which ensures that participants are as likely to be assigned to one condition as to another. It guarantees that, on average, except for the manipulation of the independent variable, there should be no systematic differences across experimental groups. There will be roughly as many men as women in each condition, as many liberals as conservatives, as many athletes as nonathletes. Random assignment thus rules out the possibility of self-selection biases in samples because the experimenter has done the selecting.

As an example of a carefully designed experiment, let’s reconsider two findings: U.S. Southerners are more likely to commit homicide in situations where there has been an insult, and Southerners are more likely to believe that violence is an appropriate response to an insult. Both of these findings are correlational: Southernness is associated with insult-related homicides, and Southernness is associated with the belief that violence is an appropriate response to an insult.

To study further whether Southerners actually do react more aggressively to insults, Cohen and his colleagues conducted a series of experiments (D. Cohen et al., 1996). The participants were all middle-class male students at the University of Michigan; some were Southerners and some were Northerners. All of them believed they were participating in a study on the effects of time constraints on judgments of various kinds. After filling out a questionnaire, they were asked to take it down a long, narrow hallway lined with filing cabinets and to leave it on a table at the end.

As participants in the experimental condition walked down the hall, another student stood in the hallway with a file drawer pulled out. For the participant to pass by, the student had to push in the drawer and move out of the way. Moments later, when the participant returned down the same hallway, the student had to get out of the participant’s way again. This time the student slammed the drawer shut, pushed into the participant’s shoulder, and said, “Asshole.” (He then quickly exited behind a door labeled Photo Lab to avoid a physical confrontation.) Participants in the control condition simply left the questionnaire on the table without incident. (The participants were, of course, randomly assigned to one or the other condition.) The study therefore had two independent variables: one involving a manipulated variable (insulted versus control) and one involving a nonmanipulated “correlational” variable (Northerner versus Southerner).

Several dependent variables were examined after the insult either did or did not take place. First, observers noted the participants' immediate reactions after the insult. Insulted Southerners usually showed a flash of anger; insulted Northerners were more likely to shrug their shoulders or to appear amused. Second, participants were asked to read a story in which a man made a pass at another man's fiancée and then to provide an ending to the story. Southerners who had been insulted were much more likely to provide a violent ending than Southerners who hadn't been insulted, whereas the endings provided by Northerners were unaffected by the insult. Third, each participant's level of testosterone, the hormone associated with aggression in males, was tested both before and after the insult occurred (or did not occur). The level of testosterone increased for Southerners who had been insulted, but it did not increase for Southerners who hadn't been insulted or for Northerners, whether insulted or not.

Fourth, participants were asked to walk back down the narrow hallway, and this time another assistant to the experimenter walked toward the participant. This tall, muscular assistant was instructed to walk down the middle of the hall, forcing the participant to dodge out of his way. The dependent variable was how far away the participant was when he finally swerved out of the assistant's way. The investigators predicted that the insulted Southerners would be put into such an aggressive mood that they would play "chicken" with the assistant, waiting until the last moment to swerve aside. And indeed they did. Northerners, whether insulted or not, swerved aside at a distance of about 5 feet (1.4 meters) from the assistant. Southerners, who are known for their politeness, stood aside at around 9 feet (2.75 meters) if not insulted, but they pushed ahead until 3 feet away (less than 1 meter) if they had been insulted.

This study was not an experiment in the full sense. Only one of the independent variables was created by random assignment—namely, whether the participant was insulted or not. The other independent variable was status as a Southerner or Northerner. Thus, part of the study was correlational. The basic finding was that something about Southernness predisposes college men to respond aggressively to insults, but the study doesn't indicate what the causally relevant aspect of Southernness is.

In many cases, however, experimental research can establish a causal relationship between two variables. Recall from Chapter 1 the study in which Darley and Batson (1973) found that seminary students in a hurry were less likely to offer aid to someone in need of help. In that experiment, the main independent variable was whether or not the student was in a hurry, and the dependent variable was whether or not the student stopped to help the person. The seminary students were randomly assigned to either the experimental ("late") condition or the control ("not late") condition. This random assignment ensured that participants in the two conditions were, on average, the same kind of people, and, in so doing, minimized the chance that any hidden third variable was responsible for the obtained results. In this case, random assignment ensured that it was something related to being late that caused such a large proportion of seminarians in the late condition to fail to help the person in need.

Although experimental research can provide answers to questions about causality that purely correlational research cannot, experiments are not without their limitations. One limitation, alluded to earlier, is that sometimes an experiment is simply not possible or wouldn't be ethical to conduct. We wouldn't want to assign 10-year-old children to watch lots of violent TV over a long period of time, for example. And we couldn't randomly assign some people to be married and others to remain single. Nonetheless, causality can sometimes be established in important domains like these. One way to get closer to establishing causality in such situations is by taking advantage of natural experiments. In a natural experiment, events occur that the investigator believes will have causal implications for some outcome. For example, in the early 1970s, the children’s TV show *Sesame Street* could be viewed by some children but not others because the TV signal was not strong enough to broadcast the show in all areas of the country. Children’s academic performance in their early years of grade school was superior in areas where the show could be viewed than in areas where it could not (Kearney & Levine, 2015). These findings are not decisive, but they strongly suggest that viewing *Sesame Street* improves school readiness.

> “Science walks forward on two feet, namely theory and experiment. Sometimes it is one foot which is put forward first, sometimes the other, but continuous progress is only made by the use of both.”
>
> —ROBERT MILLIKAN, NOBEL PRIZE-WINNER IN PHYSICS

Another example of a natural experiment occurred when China introduced several measures to combat air pollution in Beijing in the period just prior to and during the 2008 Olympic games. Children born on a particular day in Beijing in August of that year had higher birth weights than children born on the same day in 2007 and 2009 (Rich et al., 2015). This doesn’t establish causation but it suggests that air pollution negatively affects the health of a fetus.

LOOKING BACK

Social psychologists study phenomena by observational methods, archival research involving records of various kinds, and surveys in which people are asked questions. The validity of surveys typically depends on using respondents who are randomly sampled from the population they represent. Correlational research, in which the investigator establishes whether there is a relationship between two variables, suffers from the problem that the individuals being studied have “chosen” their level on each variable rather than being assigned a level by the investigator. In experimental research, the investigator manipulates an independent variable and observes the effects of the manipulation on a dependent variable.

Glossary

hypothesis
A prediction about what will happen under particular circumstances.

theory
A set of related propositions intended to describe some phenomenon or aspect of the world.

correlational research
Research that involves measuring two or more variables and assessing whether there is a relationship between them.

experimental research
In social psychology, research that randomly assigns people to different conditions, or situations, enabling researchers to make strong inferences about why a relationship exists or how different situations affect behavior.

third variable
A variable, often unmeasured in correlational research, that can be the true explanation for the relationship between two other variables.

self-selection

In correlational research, the situation in which the participant, rather than the researcher, determines the participant’s level of each variable (for example, how many hours per day they spend playing video games or whether or not they are married), thereby creating the problem that unknown other properties might be responsible for the observed relationship.

longitudinal study

A study conducted at different points in time with the same participants.

independent variable

In correlational research, this variable is measured. In experimental research, this variable is manipulated; it is hypothesized to be the cause of a particular outcome.

dependent variable

In experimental research, the variable that is measured (as opposed to manipulated); it is hypothesized to be affected by manipulation of the independent variable.

control condition

A condition comparable to the experimental condition in every way except that it lacks the one ingredient hypothesized to produce the expected effect on the dependent variable.

random assignment

Assigning participants in experimental research to different conditions randomly, so they are as likely to be assigned to one condition as to another, with the effect of making the types of people in the different conditions roughly equal.

natural experiment

A naturally occurring event or phenomenon with somewhat different conditions (e.g., before versus after) that can be compared with almost as much rigor as conditions manipulated by the investigator in an experiment.

The Criteria of Sound Research

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Assess the soundness of social psychological research studies using specific measures of validity and reliability.
- Explain the importance of replication in science.

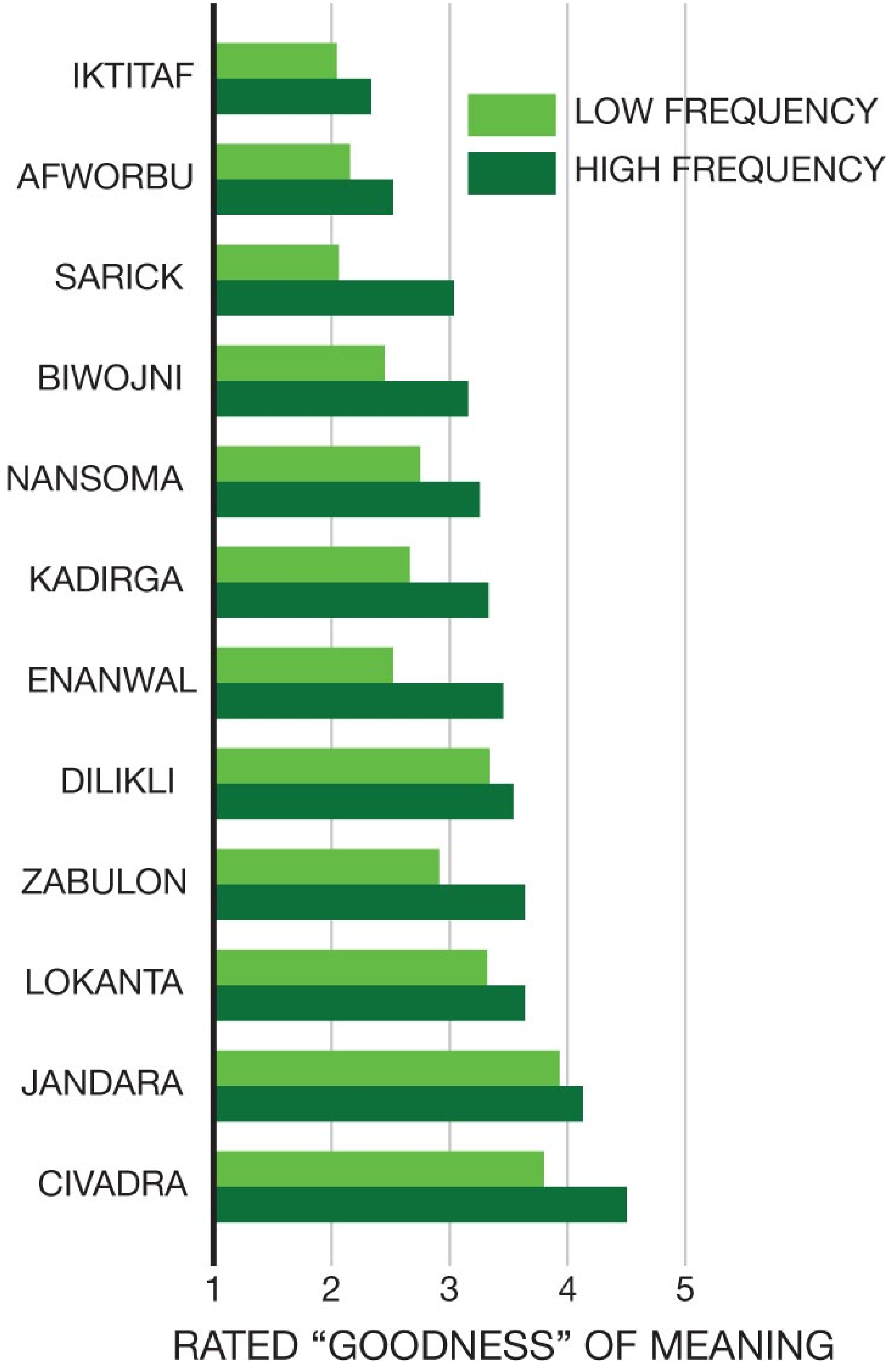
All research is not created equal. Just because someone has conducted a study doesn't mean you should accept the results as fact. What sets a well-designed study apart from a flawed one? In an experiment, random assignment and a carefully designed control group can go a long way toward eliminating potential problems. But in designing any study, researchers also need to carefully consider certain types of validity and reliability as well as the statistical significance of their findings.

External Validity in Experiments

The previous section pointed out the weaknesses of correlational research, but experimental studies can have weaknesses, too. Sometimes experiments can be so removed from everyday life that it can be hard to know how to interpret them (Aronson et al., 1990). External validity is an indication of how well the results of a study pertain to contexts outside the conditions of the laboratory. When researchers are unable to generalize the results to real-life situations, there is poor external validity. When the purpose of the research is to be directly relevant to events in the outside world, external validity is critical. For example, if researchers are investigating whether watching violence on TV makes children more aggressive immediately after they watch the programs, the TV programs the children see in the study should resemble real TV shows, and the types of aggressive behavior examined should be behavior that children might actually engage in.

Poor external validity isn’t always a problem. Milgram’s study of obedience (discussed in Chapters 1 and 8) had poor external validity in the sense that few people in our society ever face a situation in which an authority figure commands them to harm another person. Nevertheless, Milgram’s study illuminates why such things have happened in the world and will likely happen again.

As in Milgram’s study, researchers sometimes deliberately strip down a situation to its bare essentials to make a theoretical point that would be hard to make in real-world circumstances. To find out how familiarity with a stimulus influences its attractiveness, Robert Zajonc (1968) and his colleagues showed fictitious Turkish words and fake Chinese characters to Americans, presenting some of them many times and some of them only a few times (**Figure 2.3**). The more times participants saw a given stimulus, the more they thought the stimulus referred to something good. The experiment had poor external validity because the experimental situation was unlike something anyone would ever encounter in real life. But the simplicity of the situation and the initial unfamiliarity of the foreign words and characters ensured that the sheer number of repetitions of the “words,” and not something else about the stimuli, affected their attractiveness. In research like Zajonc’s, in which the purpose is to clarify a general idea or theory, external validity is not essential.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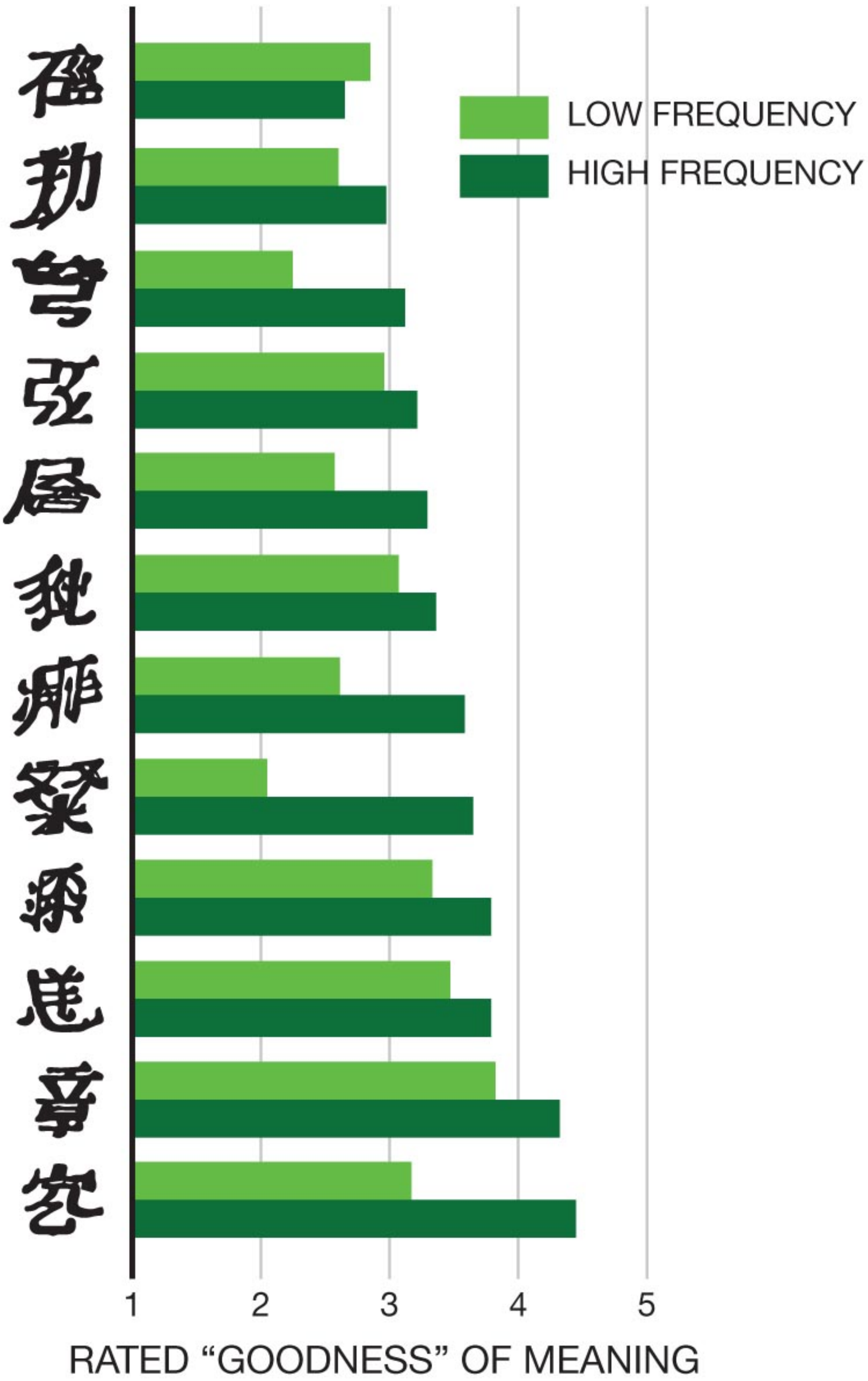
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RATED “GOODNESS” OF MEANING

FIGURE 2.3 **EXTERNAL VALIDITY** In this study, researchers presented fictitious Turkish words and made-up Chinese characters to participants a varying number of times. After the presentation, the participants were asked to guess how positive the meaning was for each word or character. Words and characters that were presented many times were more likely to be regarded as referring to something positive. Although this study has poor external validity because nobody in real life would be in such a situation, it was a good test of the hypothesis that mere familiarity with a stimulus makes it more attractive. Source: Adapted from Zajonc, 1968.

One of the best ways to ensure external validity is to conduct a field experiment. Similar conceptually to a laboratory experiment, a field experiment takes place in the real world, usually with participants who are unaware that they are involved in a research study at all. An example would be an experiment in which researchers study the reactions of people who are asked to give up their seats on an uncrowded bus or train.

In the field experiment described at the beginning of this chapter, Cohen and Nisbett (1997) examined business owners' reactions to a letter allegedly written by a job applicant who had been convicted of a felony. The felony in question was either a motor vehicle theft or, in the version you read, a homicide in the context of a love triangle. The dependent variable was the business owner's degree of responsiveness to the applicant's letter, ranging from failing to respond at all to sending an encouraging letter and an application form. Southern retailers were much more encouraging than Northern retailers toward the man convicted of homicide. The experiment provides, in a field setting, evidence that Southern norms concerning violence in response to an insult are more accepting than Northern norms. Because there was no difference in the reactions of Southerners and Northerners to the letter that mentioned a theft, we know that Southerners are not simply more forgiving of crimes generally. Thus, the theft letter constitutes a control condition in this field experiment. And because the participants were potential employers who believed that they were responding to a real applicant, the experiment’s external validity is much higher than it would be if the participants had been asked to assess fictional job applicants in a laboratory setting.

Even when research results can be shown to apply to the real world, there is the related question of how broadly applicable they are. The best known social psychological research has been performed by researchers in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. As noted in Chapter 1, there is reason to believe that some of the findings reported by researchers in these Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (or WEIRD) countries may not apply to people in other parts of the world (Henrich et al., 2010). Cross-cultural research has been an important part of social psychology for some time, but efforts to test psychological theories in less-studied parts of the world have intensified in recent years.

Even within the WEIRD world, the preponderance of research has been conducted by a narrow demographic slice of the population and has often involved a narrow range of research participants as well. Here, too, the call has gone out to broaden the pool of scientists who are conducting psychological research and to make sure that their theories and findings do not rest solely or largely on the responses of White, educated, relatively well-off participants (Roberts et al., 2020; Sue et al., 1999). Because people truly are part of one human family, many of the results produced by social psychological research will apply to people the world over. But as you’ll see throughout this book, context and culture often matter, and consequently many patterns and tendencies observed in one group or in one part of the world may be very different in another.

Internal Validity in Experiments

Whatever the goal of an experiment, internal validity is essential. Internal validity refers to the likelihood that only the manipulated variable—and no other external influence—could have produced the results. The experimental situation is held constant in all other respects, and participants in the various experimental conditions don’t differ at all, on average, before they come to the laboratory. You’ll remember the easy way to avoid the possibility that participants will differ from each other in some unanticipated way that might influence the results: by randomly assigning them to the various experimental conditions—for example, by flipping a coin to determine the condition for each participant. Random assignment ensures that the participants in one condition will not be different, on average, from those in the other conditions—and this is essential for establishing internal validity.

An experiment lacks internal validity when there is a third variable that could plausibly account for any observed difference between the different conditions. For example, if Darley and Batson had asked their hurried and unhurried participants to take different routes to where they were to deliver their talks on the Good Samaritan, it could have been something about the different routes they took, not whether they were in a hurry, that was responsible for their results.

Internal validity also requires that the experimental setup seem realistic and plausible to the participants. If participants don’t believe what the experimenter tells them or if they don’t understand something crucial about the instructions or the nature of the task they are asked to perform, then internal validity will be lacking, and the experimenter can have no confidence in the results. In such cases, participants aren’t responding to the independent variable as conceptualized by the experimenter but to something else entirely.

> “Inquiry is fatal to certainty.”
>
> —WILL DURANT, PHILOSOPHER

Researchers can help ensure that their experimental design meets the criteria for internal validity by interviewing participants who have served in pilot studies, or preliminary versions of the experiment. Pilot study participants are generally told the purpose of the experiment afterward and what the investigators expected to find. Pilot participants can often provide useful information about how well the experiment is designed when they are brought in as consultants, so to speak, after the fact.

Reliability and Validity of Tests and Measures

Reliability refers to the degree to which a measure gives consistent results on repeated occasions or the degree to which two measuring instruments (such as human observers) yield the same or very similar results. If you take an IQ test twice, do you get roughly the same score (test-retest reliability)? Do two observers agree in how they rate the charisma of a world leader or the kindness of a classmate (interrater reliability)? Reliability is typically measured by correlations between 0 and 1. As a rule of thumb, ability tests such as IQ tests are expected to have test-retest reliability correlations of about .8 or higher. Personality tests, such as verbal measures of extraversion, are expected to have that level of reliability or somewhat lower. People's degree of agreement about the kindness or charisma of another person would likely show a correlation of at least .5.

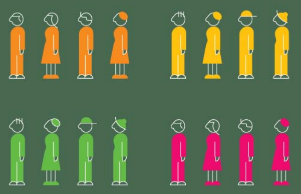
Measurement validity refers to the correlation between a measure and some outcome the measure is supposed to predict. For example, IQ test validity is measured by correlating IQ scores with grades in school and with performance in jobs. If IQ scores predict behavior that requires intelligence, we can safely infer that the test is a valid measure of intelligence. Validity coefficients, as they are called, typically do not exceed .5. Personality tests rarely correlate with behavior in a given situation more than about .3. This result is surprising to most people, who expect that a measure of extraversion should predict quite well a person's behavior at a party, and a measure of aggression should predict quite well a person's behavior in a hockey game.

A CLOSER LOOK

Threats to Internal Validity

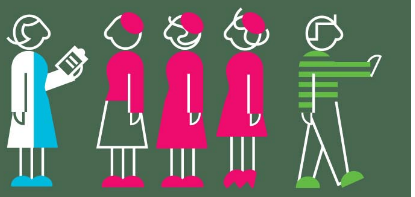
An investigator wants to be sure, after a study is run, that any observed difference in the dependent variable was caused by the manipulated difference in the independent variable. That can only happen when the design of the experiment is such that the study has high internal validity. Various shortcomings of experimental design can threaten internal validity and thereby call into question whether any variation in the dependent variable is in fact due to variation in the independent variable—whether the conclusion the investigator would like to draw is valid.

Common Threats to Internal Validity



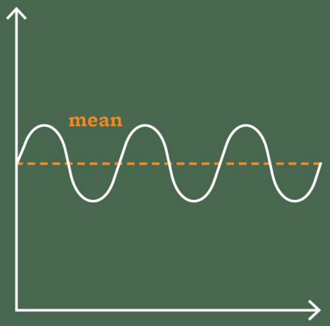
Selection bias

Assignment to conditions is not random but systematic, meaning that different kinds of people are in the different conditions, and that may be the reason for the observed difference, not the manipulated variable itself.



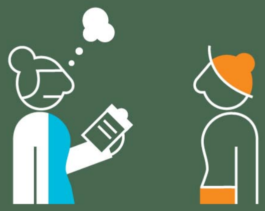
Differential attrition

If many more people "drop out" from one condition than another, the people who stay in the more taxing or upsetting condition are likely to be different from those in the other condition, thus undermining random assignment.



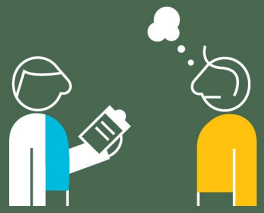
Regression to the mean

If people are in a study because they're extreme on the variable of interest, they are likely to become less extreme even if nothing is done. Therefore, a "treatment" can seem effective even when it is of no value. To combat this problem, the subjects in the treatment and control conditions should be equally extreme (by means of random assignment).



Experimenter/ rater bias

If the dependent measure has an element of subjectivity and the rater knows the hypothesis or what condition the subject or object of judgment was in, the rater may make biased judgments. The most common solution is to make the rater "blind."



Expectancy/ Hawthorne effects

Participants can be biased by their expectations about the purpose of the experiment and act in a way that confirms them. The most common solution is to make the experiment "double blind" so that neither the raters nor the participants know what the study is designed to test and/or what condition each participant is in.

FOR CRITICAL THINKING

1. Debriefing participants at the end of a study can be a useful way for researchers to determine whether the study might suffer from which of the five threats to internal validity described here?
2. Members of two student organizations study a word list while listening to music. The psychology honor society studies while classical music is played, and the running club while techno music is played. The researcher then compares the two groups' performance on a memory test. What are the threats to internal validity in this study? What steps could have been taken to eliminate them?

Statistical Significance

When researchers obtain an empirical result—such as observing a correlation between two variables or finding that some independent variable affects a dependent variable in an experiment—they can test the relationship's statistical significance. Statistical significance is a measure of the probability that a given result could have occurred by chance alone. By convention, a finding achieves statistical significance if the probability of obtaining that finding by chance is less than 1 in 20, or .05, though the required probability can vary. Statistical significance is primarily determined by two factors: (1) the size of the difference between results obtained from participants in the experimental condition and the control condition of an experiment or the strength of a relationship between variables in a correlational study and (2) the number of cases on which the finding is based. The larger the difference or the strength of the relationship and the larger the number of cases, the greater the statistical significance. Even very large differences may not be significant if they are based on a small number of cases. All the findings reported in this book are statistically significant (though not all are based on large effects). There are many nuances to determining whether a finding is statistically significant, nuances you can learn more about in a statistics course.

Replication

One of the ways in which science is different from other modes of inquiry is the importance placed on replication. Replication involves the reproduction of research results by the original investigator or by someone else. If a result is genuine or valid, it should be possible for scientists to replicate it.

Some results do not replicate: Attempts to rerun a study by duplicating the procedures don’t succeed in producing the same results, calling the results into question. Sometimes the original investigator can show that the replication attempt was not carried out correctly (the procedures were not truly duplicated), and the original result may again be found if the study is repeated properly. Sometimes, it’s just by chance that a replication attempt fails: Every result, including an attempted replication, has a certain probability of being in error. Other times, a replication attempt fails because the original result itself was a fluke or the methods that produced it were not precise or sound. And sometimes (thankfully, very rarely) a reported result is the product of outright fraud, when an investigator has simply made up samples of data to support a favored hypothesis.

Failures to replicate often generate controversy (sometimes accompanied by accusations of incompetence on the part of different investigators). Ideally, these debates result in consensus about whether a particular finding should be accepted or not. In this way, science is self-correcting. Errors are made and initial interpretations may be faulty, but over time the scientific community learns to distinguish the claims we can be confident about from those that are not as solid.

In recent years, there has been increasing concern that many scientific findings do not replicate—in fields ranging from cell biology to neuroscience to drug efficacy research (Ioannidis, 2005). In 2015, Brian Nosek and dozens of other psychologists published an article in the journal *Science* reporting on attempts to replicate 100 psychology studies (Open Science Collaboration, 2015). They found that only 36–47 percent of the original studies were successfully replicated. Other systematic efforts to reproduce the results of findings reported in behavioral science journals have yielded higher replication rates, on the order of 78–85 percent (Camerer et al., 2016; Klein et al., 2014).

BOX 2.3

FOCUS ON CRITICAL THINKING

Regression to the Mean

An important and frequently misunderstood statistical regularity is known as “regression to the mean”: the tendency for extreme scores on one variable to be followed by, or to accompany, less extreme scores on another variable (or scores on the same variable examined at a different time). This is a completely universal phenomenon. Extreme scores on any variable are farther away from the mean of a distribution of scores, and scores close to the mean of most distributions are more common than extreme scores farther from the mean. This pattern is visible in

Figure 2.4, which shows a *normal distribution*, sometimes called a bell curve. Many types of variables are distributed in this fashion: IQ, physical height, annual corn yield in Iowa, the number of mistakes per day in the manufacturing of glass jars. These variables are distributed in this way because every score has a chance component: the luck of the genetic draw, the particular weather conditions last year in Iowa. Scores come to be extreme because of particular patterns of chance events that are rare and unlikely to be repeated. Extremely tall fathers have sons who are typically closer to the mean, and extremely tall sons, in turn, tend to have fathers who are closer to the mean. The rookie of the year in baseball typically doesn’t do as well in his second year. Your unhappiest day is likely to be followed by one that’s not so unhappy. When you go to the doctor with a bad cold, you’ll likely get better even if all the doctor does is say “hello.” The reason is that you probably went when your symptoms were close to their peak intensity and therefore had no place to go except down—in other words, back toward the mean of your health distribution. (This isn’t true, of course, for progressive diseases such as arthritis or cardiovascular problems.)

An interesting application of the concept of regression to the mean was noted by Daniel Kahneman in his attempt to improve the training of Israeli pilots (Kahneman & Tversky, 1973b). Kahneman told the instructors that a general principle of learning is that people benefit more from positive feedback, which informs them about what they’re doing right, than they do from negative feedback, which tells them what they’re doing wrong. The instructors insisted that this principle, however valid in a psychology laboratory, did not apply to pilot training: When they praised an unusually good maneuver, the novice pilot typically performed worse the next time around. Moreover, if they shouted at the pilot for a particularly bad performance, the pilot nearly always performed better the next time around. But of course, the instructor could say nothing at all and get the same results simply due to regression to the mean: A particularly good performance would typically be followed by a worse one the next time a maneuver was tried, and a particularly bad performance would typically be followed by a better one the next time around. Once the instructors understood this idea, they got better results, and novice pilots had a more pleasant training experience.

Regression to the mean, at its core, is probabilistic. The reason the rookie of the year did so well is that the stars aligned just right: The athlete was in perfect health and had no injuries, there were no family or love life problems, and the team had just hired the best coach in the league. The odds are against such a confluence of favorable events the next year.

Regression to the mean is an extremely important concept to have in your critical thinking toolbox. Once you have it firmly in mind, you’ll see it crop up constantly as you observe and think about human behavior and about all kinds of other events that have a chance component. Before jumping to conclusions about a pattern that might seem meaningful, ask yourself, “Might this just be another example of regression to the mean?”

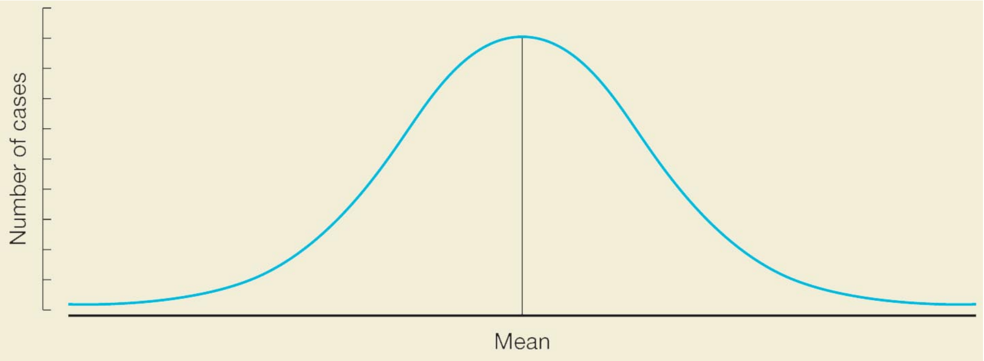


FIGURE 2.4 **A Normal Distribution: The Bell Curve** Variables distributed in this fashion, which include most human physical, mental, and personality traits, have a mean at the center of the distribution, and there are more cases at the center than at any other location. The more a value for a given observation of a variable departs from the mean, the more likely it is to regress toward the mean when observed subsequently. Extreme observations on a given variable are likely to be associated with less extreme observations on a related variable (e.g., very tall sons are likely to have fathers who are not so extremely tall; very brilliant women are likely to have mates who are less brilliant).

But even the latter rates may not be high enough for comfort, and the issue of replication has generated a great deal of debate about how to ensure that readers of scientific journals can have confidence in the reported results (D. T. Gilbert et al., 2016; Lilienfeld & Strother, 2020; Maxwell, Lau, & Howard, 2015; Renkewitz & Heene, 2019). These debates have inspired a host of new research practices that, in combination, should improve the replicability of reported research (De Boeck & Jeon, 2018; Simons, Holcombe, & Spellman, 2014; Nelson, Simmons, & Simonsohn, 2018; Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2011).

Note that in social psychology, some failures to replicate are nearly inevitable because of the very nature of the subject matter. For example, research conducted in the early part of this century found that exposing people to images of the American flag made them more politically conservative (T. Carter, Ferguson, & Hassin, 2011). Subsequent studies failed to find that “priming” people with the flag had any effect (Klein et al., 2014). When the initial studies were conducted, Republican George W. Bush was in the White House—a president and an administration marked by the tragic events of September 11, 2001, and an aggressive military response to those events. But the political atmosphere changed after Barack Obama was elected president in 2008, and this may have changed the associations many people had with the U.S. flag, altering the very psychology that led to the original reported effects.

Thus, context matters, and as the world itself changes, we should expect some research findings not to replicate even if the basic psychological principles underlying the original research are valid. That said, some failures to replicate are due to shoddy work on the part of the original investigators, which produced results that were never, in fact, true or valid. In those cases, investigators who report failed attempts to replicate do a great service to everyone by setting the record straight.

Among the changes that have been put in place to increase the replicability of research findings is a substantial increase in the sample sizes generally used in research. With small sample sizes, it’s easier to obtain apparently significant results that are, in reality, just flukes. Another remedy has been the insistence that investigators report the results of all measures collected and all experimental conditions run in their studies. If an investigator obtains statistically significant results on one measure—but not on several other measures that, theoretically, should yield similar results—there’s reason to worry that the one significant result may be a fluke (a “false positive” error). Reporting the results of all measures rather than highlighting a subset of measures serves as a safeguard against such errors. Still another proposed remedy has been the call for investigators to preregister and make public their methods, hypotheses, and data analysis procedures before they conduct their research. Preregistration prevents researchers from hypothesizing after the fact, and, as a result, from cherry-picking only those analyses and results that support their claims—including those claims that the investigators only thought to make *after* seeing the results of their studies.

Preregistration is only one part of open science: the broad approach to ensuring that scientific research is sound and that reported results are likely to replicate. Just as transparency is seen as the best remedy for combating corruption in government, publicizing all the steps taken and results obtained in a program of research serves as both a deterrent to and a check on shoddy research. When investigators share their methods and data with any interested party, it is easier to check whether reported findings stand up to scrutiny and to conduct replications that are truly informative.

In this textbook, we have tried to be scrupulous about noting when the evidence about a given point is mixed, usually because of replication failures or the existence of similar studies that produced a different result. There are no guarantees in any science. Social psychology is an ever-evolving field. It's a safe bet that some of the findings reported in this textbook (not a large number, we suspect) will turn out to be mistaken or misleading. But we are confident that, over time, social psychologists will weed out those findings that are illusory and leave us with those that are genuine.

LOOKING BACK

External validity refers to how well the results of a study generalize to contexts outside the laboratory. Internal validity refers to the extent to which investigators can know that only the manipulated variable could have produced the results of a study. Reliability refers to the degree to which different measuring instruments or the same instrument at different times produces the same values for a given variable. Measurement validity refers to the extent to which a measure predicts outcomes that it is supposed to measure. Statistical significance is a measure of the probability that a result could have occurred by chance. Replication of results increases our confidence in them, and it is important for reported results to be subject to attempts at replication. Doing so allows social psychologists to distinguish between those results that are truly solid from those that are illusory.

Glossary

external validity

How well the results of a study generalize to contexts outside the conditions of the laboratory.

field experiment

An experiment conducted in the real world (not a lab), usually with participants who are not aware that they are in a study of any kind.

internal validity

In experimental research, confidence that only the manipulated variable could have produced the results.

reliability

The degree to which the particular way researchers measure a given variable is likely to yield consistent results.

measurement validity

The correlation between a measure and some outcome the measure is supposed to predict.

statistical significance

A measure of the probability that a given result could have occurred by chance.

replication

Reproduction of research results by the original investigator or by someone else.

open science

Practices such as sharing data and research materials with anyone in the broader scientific community in an effort to increase the integrity and replicability of scientific research.

Ethical Concerns in Social Psychological Research

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify some of the ethical considerations that must be weighed when designing a research study.
- Explain the importance of debriefing subjects after they participate in research.

Most people would want to conduct research geared toward changing people’s attitudes only if they believed the direction of change was for the better. We wouldn’t support research that might have the effect of encouraging people to engage in unhealthy or dangerous behaviors. If there is a suspicion that a study might have harmful effects on some participants, it should be reviewed by people unconnected with the research. Research conducted at universities that has the potential for harm has to be approved by an institutional review board (IRB), a committee that examines research proposals and makes judgments about their ethical appropriateness. An IRB includes at least one scientist, one nonscientist, and one person who is not affiliated with the institution. If some aspect of the study’s procedures is deemed overly harmful, that procedure must be changed before the research can be approved. Before 2018, all social psychological research conducted with federal funds had to be submitted to an IRB. Now investigators are not required to obtain IRB approval if a study involves only a manifestly “benign intervention,” such as ordinary interviews and surveys, ability and personality tests, economic games, or tests of basic cognitive and perceptual processes.

Proposed research may be approved even if it makes people uncomfortable or embarrassed or causes physical pain—as long as the research is deemed sufficiently likely to yield scientific information of significant value and the discomfort or harm to the participants is not too great. For example, the Milgram studies on obedience (1963, 1974) were conducted before IRB committees existed. Today, Milgram’s proposal would be thoroughly examined by an IRB, and it’s not clear whether it would be approved. On the one hand, there is no question that Milgram’s research made some participants extremely uncomfortable; their psychological distress was manifest to observers. On the other hand, many (if not most) people would consider the knowledge gained to be enormous. It’s impossible to think about Nazi Germany the same way after learning the results of the Milgram studies. And we can no longer blithely assume that ordinary, decent people would refuse to obey commands that are patently harmful. Different IRBs would undoubtedly reach different conclusions about the admissibility of the Milgram experiments today. What do you think? Would you permit research like Milgram’s to be conducted? (We discuss a couple of IRB-approved modifications to Milgram’s procedure in the discussion of obedience in Chapter 8.)

Informed consent—a participant’s agreement to participate after learning about all relevant aspects of the procedure—is required for that small fraction of social psychological research that poses the possibility of significant harm. However, for certain types of studies, known as deception research, it’s not possible to obtain informed consent from the participants. Darley and Batson (1973) couldn’t have told their seminary participants that the stated reason for their need to hurry was bogus and that the apparent person in need was actually a confederate who was merely acting as part of the experiment. Informed consent would have defeated the purpose of the study. Even in deception research, however, participants are generally told about the goals of the research project afterward during debriefing. The debriefing session serves an important educational purpose: It informs participants about the broad questions being addressed, the specific hypotheses being tested, and the potential social value of the results. Debriefing can also be helpful to the investigators by letting them know whether participants are interpreting the stimuli used in the experiment as the investigator intended.

When asked their opinion about what they were put through, deceived participants generally understand the reasons and often say they learned more, and enjoyed the study more, than subjects who were not deceived or made uncomfortable (S. S. Smith & Richardson, 1983). For example, participants in the insult condition of the Cohen study actually reported that they learned more and had a better time than participants in the control condition.

When participants have been deceived or made uncomfortable, experimenters owe them a full accounting of what was done, what aspects of the procedure involved deception, why they were made uncomfortable, what the experiment was intended to examine, and what potential value to society the research might provide.

LOOKING BACK

Psychology research that poses a significant possibility of harm is submitted to an IRB. Minor harm to participants is sometimes allowed when the potential gain in knowledge is considered great enough.

Glossary

institutional review board (IRB)

A committee that examines research proposals and makes judgments about the ethical appropriateness of the research.

informed consent

A person’s signed agreement to participate in a procedure or research study after learning all of its relevant aspects.

deception research

Research in which the participants are misled about the purpose of the research or the meaning of something that is done to them.

debriefing

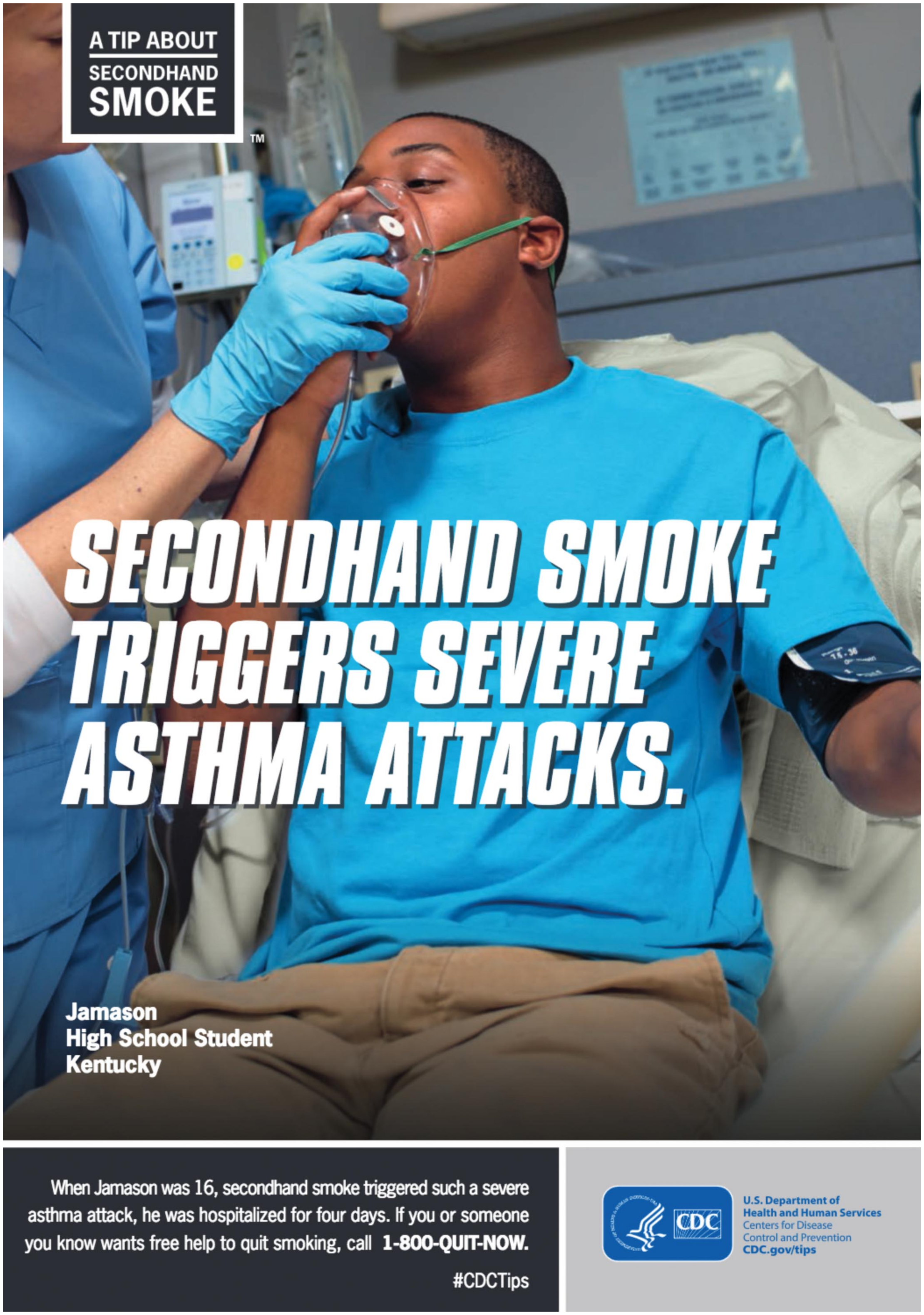
In preliminary versions of an experiment, asking participants directly if they understood the instructions, found the setup to be reasonable, and so on. After an experiment, debriefing is used to educate participants about the questions being studied.

Basic and Applied Science

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- Distinguish between basic and applied research and explain how the findings of each contribute to the other.

The practice of scientific research has two broad types: basic and applied. Basic science (or basic research) is concerned with trying to understand some phenomenon in its own right, rather than using a finding to solve a particular real-world problem. Basic scientific studies are conducted with a view toward using the findings to build valid theories about the nature of some aspect of the world. For example, social psychologists investigating people’s obedience to an authority figure in the laboratory are doing basic science in an attempt to understand the nature of obedience and the factors that influence it. They’re not trying to find ways to make people less obedient to dubious authorities, though they may hope that their research is relevant to such real-world problems.


A TIP ABOUT
SECONDHAND
SMOKE
TM
SECONDHAND SMOKE TRIGGERS SEVERE ASTHMA ATTACKS.
Jamason
High School Student
Kentucky
U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention
CDC.gov/tips

When Jamason was 16, secondhand smoke triggered such a severe asthma attack, he was hospitalized for four days. If you or someone you know wants free help to quit smoking, call **1-800-QUIT-NOW.**

#CDCTips

APPLIED RESEARCH Social psychological research can be undertaken to solve real-world, applied problems, such as how to persuade people not to smoke.

Applied science (or applied research) is concerned with solving a real-world problem of importance. An example of applied research in social psychology would be a study of how to make preteens less susceptible to cigarette advertising. (One way is to make them aware of tobacco companies’ motives and their cynical desire to get teens to do something that is not in their best interests.)

There is a two-way relationship between basic and applied research. Basic research can give rise to theories that may lead to interventions, or efforts to change certain behaviors. For example, social psychologist Carol Dweck and her colleagues found that people who believe that intelligence is the product of sustained hard work study harder in school and get better grades than people who believe that intelligence is a matter of genes (that is, people who think you’re either intelligent or not, and you can’t do much to change it; Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995). Her basic research on the impact of beliefs about intelligence on school performance prompted her to design an intervention with Black and Hispanic junior high students. She told some of them that their intelligence was under their control and gave them information about how working on school subjects actually changes the physical nature of the brain (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Henderson & Dweck, 1990). Those students worked harder and got better grades than students who were not given such information.

The direction of influence can also go the other way: Applied research can produce results that feed back into basic science. For example, applied studies during World War II on how to produce effective war propaganda led to an extensive program of basic research on attitude change. That program, in turn, gave rise to theories of attitude change and social influence that continue to inform basic science and to generate new techniques of changing attitudes in applied, real-world contexts.

LOOKING BACK

Basic science attempts to discover fundamental principles; applied science attempts to solve real-world problems. There is an intimate relationship between the two: Basic science can reveal ways to solve real-world problems, and applied science aimed at solving real-world problems can give rise to the search for basic principles that explain why the solutions work.

Glossary

basic science
: Science or research concerned with trying to understand some phenomenon in its own right, with a view toward using that understanding to build valid theories about the nature of some aspect of the world.

applied science
: Science or research concerned with solving important real-world problems.

intervention
: An effort to change a person’s behavior.

Chapter Review

SUMMARY

The Value of Social Psychological Research

- Research by social psychologists teaches people how to interpret and predict the outcomes of various social experiences. Study results and findings help people understand their own behavior and that of others.

How Social Psychologists Test Ideas

- Social psychologists often use participant observation, placing themselves in real situations to understand a social phenomenon better. This strategy helps them plan research that will test the hypotheses developed in observational settings.
- Social psychologists use archives to gather information that helps them understand social phenomena; such records include census records, police reports, newspaper accounts, and historical and ethnographic records.
- Surveys ask people questions. Random sampling is essential for accurately describing the attitudes or behavior of a particular population, such as students at a certain university, residents of a town, or the population of a country as a whole.
- *Correlational research* examines relationships between variables, such as between people's age and their support for welfare reform. Correlations can vary in strength from −1 to +1.
- The problem of *self-selection* in correlational research occurs when the investigator is unable to choose the

level of any variable for participants. People can’t be assigned to have lots of casual sex or not, for example. Consequently, it’s impossible to know if something associated with one of the measured variables is causing the correlation between two variables or if one of the variables is causing the other.
- In *experimental research*, the investigator manipulates different levels of the *independent variable* (the variable about which a prediction is made) and measures the effects of different levels on the *dependent variable*. *Random assignment* of participants to different conditions is a key feature of experiments.

The Criteria of Sound Research

- *External validity* refers to how closely the experimental setup resembles real-life situations. The greater the external validity, the more it is possible to generalize from the results obtained to real-life settings.
- *Field experiments* test hypotheses experimentally in real-life situations rather than in the laboratory. Field experiments automatically have external validity.
- *Internal validity* refers to the likelihood that only the manipulated variable, rather than some extraneous factor such as participants’ failure to understand instructions, accounts for the results.
- *Reliability* refers to the degree to which participants receive the same score when tested with a conceptually similar instrument or when tested at different times.
- *Measurement validity* is the degree to which some measure predicts what it is supposed to, such as the degree to which an IQ test predicts school grades.
- *Statistical significance* is a measure of the probability that a result could have occurred by chance.
- *Replication* involves repeating a study to determine whether the same findings can be obtained.

Ethical Concerns in Social Psychological Research

- *Institutional review boards* are committees that review research procedures to make sure that the privacy and safety of participants are protected.
- *Informed consent* refers to the willingness of participants to take part in a study based on information presented to them before the study begins, including the procedures they will undergo and any possible risks. Informed consent is not always possible, as when an experiment involves deception, in which participants are misled about the purposes of a study.
- *Debriefing* refers to the investigator’s explanation of the purpose of the experiment after the study is over. When debriefing study participants, investigators may ask participants to assess various aspects of the experiment to make sure that the experiment is perceived as intended.

Basic and Applied Science

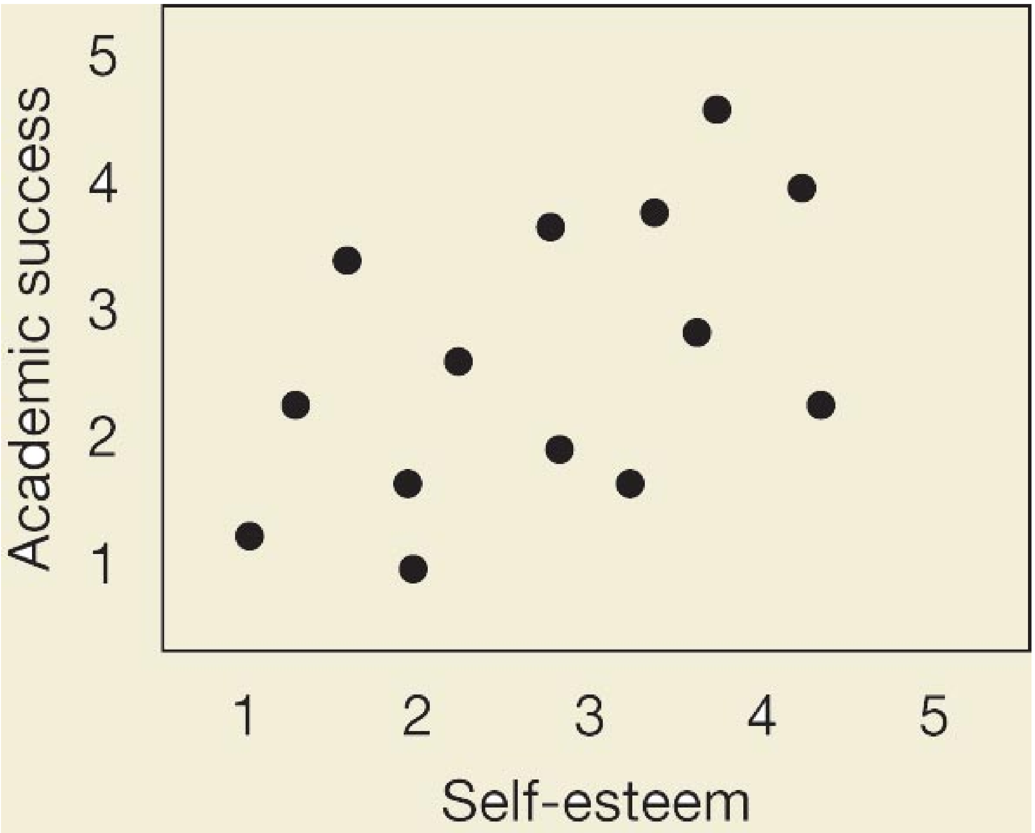
- *Basic science* is research conducted for the purpose of understanding phenomena in their own right. *Applied science* is research intended to solve real-world problems.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. After reading this chapter, do you think it’s important for students of social psychology to have a basic understanding of research methods? Why or why not?
2. Recall from Chapter 1 the experiment on nonconscious processing in which participants read a persuasive

message in a room with either a fishy smell, an unpleasant smell that was not fishy, or no distinctive smell (S. W. S. Lee & Schwarz, 2012). The researchers measured the degree to which each participant was persuaded by the message and discovered that participants were least likely to be persuaded in the presence of a fishy smell (there was something “fishy” about the message). In this experiment, what was the independent variable? What was the dependent variable?

3. Suppose a group of researchers hypothesized that finding your romantic partner to be highly physically attractive predicts high degrees of satisfaction in your relationship. To evaluate this hypothesis, the researchers asked 100 participants to complete a survey that included questions about their current relationship satisfaction as well as ratings of how physically attractive they believed their partner to be. The researchers found that the more physically attractive participants rated their partners, the more satisfied they tended to be in their relationship. In this fictitious study, did the researchers employ a correlational or an experimental design? How do you know?
4. Consider the hypothetical study in question 3 again. The researchers found a relationship between perceptions of partner physical attractiveness and relationship satisfaction. With these data, can the researchers conclude that perceiving your partner as physically attractive causes you to be more satisfied in your relationship? Are there other potential explanations for these findings?
5. In Chapter 3, you will learn about research on the self, including self-esteem. Suppose the scatterplot below displays the relationship between self-esteem and academic success. How might you interpret this graph? Is the correlation between these two variables positive or negative? Try guessing the correlation coefficient.



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6. In this textbook, you will learn about various studies evaluating social psychological phenomena using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), which measures activation in the brain while the participant lies immobile in a large metal tube. For example, researchers may measure brain activation while participants experience a social rejection or may look at how brain activation during a stressful experience is affected if a close friend holds the participant’s hand. How would you characterize the external validity of such research?

The answer guidelines for the Think About It questions can be found at the back of the book . . .

ONLINE STUDY MATERIALS

Want to earn a better grade on your test?

Go to **INQUIZITIVE** to learn and review this chapter’ s content, with personalized feedback along the way.

CHAPTER
3

The Social Self

Would comparing your tennis skills to those of a famous athlete give you an accurate sense of how good a tennis player you are?

How might childhood experiences shape one’s social self in adulthood?

Do children who play sports have higher self-esteem than those who do not?

OUTLINE

- The Nature of the Social Self
- Origins of the Sense of Self
- Self-Esteem
- Motives Driving Self-Evaluation
- Self-Regulation: Motivating and Controlling Behavior
- Self-Presentation

ON MARCH 28, 1986, IN NEW YORK CITY, Cynthia and Joseph Germanotta welcomed their first daughter, Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta, into the world. It didn’t take long for Cynthia and Joe to discover that Stefani was artistically gifted. Stefani was playing the piano by ear by the age of 4, and soon she was also singing, writing songs, and acting. By her early teens, Stefani had worked with a voice teacher and taken acting lessons while starring in local plays. But her creativity and talents weren’t always celebrated. What some saw as gifted, many of her peers saw as odd and eccentric, even “freakish,” leaving Stefani to struggle with bullying, ostracism, and deep feelings of insecurity through much of her adolescence and early adulthood.

Nonetheless, Stefani endured these challenges, and in early 2008, at the age of 22, she released her debut album, *The Fame*. The person now known worldwide as Lady Gaga was born. Lady Gaga is one of the best-selling musical artists of all time and has won countless awards for her musical achievements, including 12 Grammy Awards and 18 MTV Video Music Awards.

Yet in the eyes of many people, and undoubtedly herself, Lady Gaga is far more than a singer and performer. She is a Golden Globe–winning actress, a practicing Christian, and a passionate advocate for LGBTQ rights. She is a widely photographed and lauded fashion icon. She is a rape survivor. She is someone who has battled anorexia, bulimia, and depression. She is a philanthropist who has provided support for many causes, such as relief efforts after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti and Hurricane Sandy in 2012. She is the founder of an influential nonprofit organization, the Born This Way Foundation, that advocates for youth empowerment and against bullying, among other youth-related issues. The list goes on.

Lady Gaga provides a treasure trove of examples that illustrate the concept of the self in social psychology. Revealing how profoundly social the self is, she has spoken widely and openly about how the social obstacles and pain she endured as a child have shaped who she is today. Her fans see her as a symbol of self-acceptance and self-confidence—what social psychologists call self-esteem. And, like Lady Gaga, most of us have many sides to who we are and think of ourselves in many different ways—as a hardworking student, a loyal friend, a chocolate aficionado, an awkward dancer, a romantic, a hopeless procrastinator, an aspiring writer. In this chapter, we draw a portrait of the self as it is constructed, maintained, and negotiated in the social environment. We start by getting acquainted with the nature and contents of the self—people’s beliefs and knowledge about who they are—and where that information comes from. Next, we explore how people feel about themselves as good or bad overall, and also as good or bad students, friends, cooks, drivers, athletes, and so forth. The final third of this chapter focuses on the self and behavior—the actions people take within social contexts to reach their goals and how they shift their behavior to present certain images of themselves to others. ■

SONGWRITERS HALL OF FAME
SONGWRITERS HALL OF FAME

PITTSB
PITTSB
TEXT UNITED TO 30330
BATTLE for the
SOUL of the NATION
BIDEN
HARRIS

WHO IS LADY GAGA? Lady Gaga—pictured here receiving an award for her musical accomplishments, showing her unique fashion sense, and campaigning for Joe Biden during the 2020 presidential race—has many different selves.

The Nature of the Social Self

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Discuss the social nature of the self and the extent to which people hold accurate knowledge about themselves.
- Explain how schemas organize self-knowledge and influence how we process information about the self and others.

In his book *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), William James introduced many concepts about the self that continue to inspire research to this day. One of his most enduring contributions is reflected in the title of this chapter: “The Social Self.” James coined the term *the social me* to refer to what we know about ourselves from social relationships. James’s term reflects his conviction that the self is not something to be distinguished from the social world but rather a social entity through and through. Who a person is in one social context (with soccer buddies) is often not the same as who the person is in another social environment (with a romantic partner). Recall from Chapter 1 that there are cultural differences in the self-conceptions that people hold dear. In this chapter, we explore cultural and other key social origins of the self. As James articulated over a century ago, our sense of who we are is forged in large part by our interactions with others.

“A man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him. As many different social selves as there are distinct groups about whose opinions he cares.”

—WILLIAM JAMES

The Accuracy of Self-Knowledge

Before we explore the social underpinnings of the self, it’s reasonable to ask how we figure out who we are. The Ancient Greek admonition to “know thyself” implies that a major source of self-knowledge is, well, ourselves. Indeed, our self-understanding is largely a product of construal processes—our making sense of our experiences, preferences, attributes, and so on. Researchers like Dan McAdams (2008) even argue that people weave intricate stories about themselves, and those stories constitute a big part of our sense of who we are. If self-knowledge is based in considerable part on our construals, what does that say about the accuracy of self-knowledge? That is, if you wanted to find out who someone really is, who would you ask?

Most of us assume that the best person to ask is in fact the person we want to know about (Pronin et al., 2001). After all, this person has privileged access to self-relevant information, such as past experiences, not to mention current thoughts, feelings, and intentions (Epley & Dunning, 2006). Yet we’re also quick to recognize that people can sometimes possess a startling lack of self-insight. Recall the research described in Chapter 1 in which Nisbett and Wilson (1977) discovered that people often readily provide explanations for their behaviors that are not in fact accurate. Someone might say that she picked her favorite nightgown because of its texture or color when in fact she picked it because it was the last one she saw. Even our ability to report accurately on more important decisions—such as why we chose job candidate A over job candidate B, why we like chocolate better than peanut butter, or how we solved a particular problem—can be wide off the mark (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977).

Sometimes our lack of self-insight can be self-protective: There are things many of us would rather not know about ourselves. But much of the time, we draw inaccurate conclusions about ourselves because we don’t have access to certain mental processes, such as those that lead us to prefer objects we looked at most recently (Wilson, 2002; Wilson & Dunn, 2004). Such mental processes are nonconscious, occurring outside of our awareness, and leave us to generate alternative, plausible accounts for our preferences and behaviors instead.

Given such roadblocks, how can a person gain accurate self-knowledge? In their effort to tackle this question, Simine Vazire and Matthias Mehl (2008) asked student participants to rate how accurate they think people are at assessing how frequently they themselves perform 25 different behaviors (for example, reading, singing, watching TV). They also asked participants to rate how accurate they think people are at predicting how often *other* people they know well perform these behaviors. For every single behavior, the participants rated the accuracy of self-predictions to be greater than the accuracy of predictions about others—in other words, there was a widespread assumption that each of us is our own best expert.

In a subsequent study, however, the same researchers had participants report how often they engaged in each of the 25 behaviors. They also recruited “informants”—close friends, parents, and romantic partners of the students in the study—to report on the participants’ behaviors. Then, over a 4-day period, with students wearing a device that recorded the ambient sounds of their daily lives, Vazire and Mehl measured the actual frequency of participants’ behaviors. Contrary to the assumption that we know ourselves the best, they found that the reports of close others are as accurate as our own in anticipating our actual behavior.

“I don’ t know anybody here but the hostess—and, of course, in a deeper sense, myself.”

But there’ s more to the story. Interestingly, ratings made by the self and ratings made by close others *independently* predicted the self’ s behavior; that is, both the self and others have at least some accurate insight into who one is. But a closer inspection of the findings showed that certain aspects of a person are uniquely known to the self, and certain aspects are uniquely known to others (Vazire, 2010; Vazire & Carlson, 2011). Because we have greater information than others do about our inner states (such as our thoughts and feelings), we are better judges of our internal traits (being optimistic or pessimistic, for instance). Other people, though, have better information for judging our external traits because they are able to observe our overt behavior (such as whether we are boisterous or outspoken).

Vazire and colleagues further point out that motivational forces might also be at play. As we will explore later in this chapter, most people want to think well of themselves, so when it comes to traits that we value highly, such as creativity, other people tend to know us better than we know ourselves—because their judgments are less likely to be tainted by the desire to arrive at favorable assessments of the self.

The Organization of Self-Knowledge

Regardless of its accuracy, there's no question that most of us have an enormous pool of self-knowledge. Collectively, all this self-knowledge is stored in our memories in some fashion, and it's capable of being retrieved, elaborated on, and used as a source of information and continuity as well as comfort or dismay.

Social psychologists assume that self-knowledge is stored in memory in cognitive structures known as self-schemas. Built from past experience, self-schemas represent people's beliefs and feelings about themselves, both in general and in particular kinds of situations (Greenwald, 1980; Markus, 1977; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Consider the domain of conscientiousness, or your ability to follow norms and goals and stay on task. Each of us has a self-schema, stored in memory, representing our beliefs and feelings about how conscientious (or not) we are. These beliefs and feelings are based on our experiences in situations where conscientiousness was relevant (such as studying for exams or remembering a sibling's birthday). Like the schemas we have about personality traits, other people, situations, and objects, the schemas we have about ourselves serve as more than simple storehouses of self-knowledge. They also perform an organizing function by helping us navigate and make sense of all the information we encounter in the context of daily living.

In one of the earliest studies of self-schemas, Hazel Markus (1977) hypothesized that if self-schemas exist, then a person who has a self-schema in a particular domain (for example, a schema about how extraverted one is) should process information in that domain more quickly, retrieve evidence consistent with the schema more rapidly, and readily reject information that contradicts the schema. To test these hypotheses, Markus first identified participants who considered themselves either quite dependent or quite independent. She labeled the participants who rated themselves closer to the extremes of dependence and independence as “schematic.” She also identified “aschematic” participants: those who rated themselves moderately on this dimension and for whom neither dependence nor independence was important to their self-definition.

Several weeks after Markus first asked participants to rate their level of dependence, she asked them to rate how well a series of traits described them. The schematic participants judged schema-relevant traits as true or not true of themselves much more quickly than aschematic participants did, suggesting that people are particularly attuned to information that maps onto an existing self-schema. Also, when asked to do so, the schematic participants were able to generate many more behaviors consistent with the schema-relevant traits, suggesting that past actions and experiences supporting the self-schema are abundant in memory and come readily to mind. Finally, the schematic participants were more likely to refute feedback from a personality test that contradicted their self-schemas; for example, independent participants who were told they were actually dependent tended to deny it. In short, regardless of their accuracy, self-schemas serve as a basic unit of organization for self-knowledge and influence our interpretations and judgments of ourselves. Self-schemas also shape how we view the social world. For example, someone who is schematic on conscientiousness is likely to be far more attuned to how conscientious other people are compared with someone who is aschematic on this dimension. In the next chapter and in Chapters 10 and 11, we discuss how schemas of all kinds (e.g., schemas about a particular social group) influence our social perceptions.

LOOKING BACK

The notion that the self is fundamentally social has long been recognized. As the immediate or broader social context shifts, so too may the nature of the self. Self-knowledge is derived in large part from construal processes, is limited by what people have access to, and can be distorted by motivational forces. Self-knowledge is stored in memory in cognitive structures known as self-schemas.

Glossary

self-schema

A cognitive structure, derived from past experience, that represents a person’s beliefs and feelings about the self, in both general and specific situations.

Origins of the Sense of Self

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- List some of the possible social origins of self-knowledge.
- Explain how the self can be described as both malleable and stable.
- Describe the links between culture and gender and self-construals.

What are the building blocks of self-construals? Where does your sense of self come from? To answer these questions, a social psychologist would point to the way social situations shape the self. The social situation can be as concrete as the presence of a close friend or a more academically successful or wealthier classmate. It can also be rather abstract and diffuse, involving norms conveyed by key institutions in one’s culture or by members of an important social group, such as one’s gender group.

Family and Other Socialization Agents

We learn what attitudes and behaviors are socially appropriate from parents, siblings, teachers, peers, and other *socialization agents*. This process happens directly, as when parents insist that their children share, take turns, and say “thank you,” as well as indirectly, such as when teachers model appropriate behaviors. By encouraging certain behaviors and providing opportunities to participate in particular activities, socialization agents influence the personality traits, abilities, and preferences we come to think of as our own. Imagine a woman whose Jewish parents took her to synagogue every week as a child, enrolled her in Hebrew lessons, and made sure she had a Bat Mitzvah ceremony. Because of this upbringing, it’s not surprising that being Jewish would become central to this woman’s sense of self as an adult. Another example is children who grow up witnessing their parents attend and organize Black Lives Matter protests becoming BLM activists themselves.

Another way that family and other socialization agents shape the self is captured by the notion that we come to know ourselves by imagining what others think of us. The sociologist Charles H. Cooley (1902) coined the phrase “looking-glass self” to refer to the idea that other people’s reactions to us—their approval or disapproval—serve as a mirror of sorts. That is, self-knowledge is derived in part from reflected self-appraisals, our beliefs about what others think about us. Throughout our lives, we experience overt or subtle reactions and appraisals from others. For example, your parents praise your accomplishments; a romantic partner makes light of your fears; a teacher assigns you a challenging task; your peers laugh heartily at your jokes. Reactions and appraisals like these convey that you’re competent, neurotic, have potential, or are funny. In short, we see ourselves partly through the eyes of those around us.

GOTTA MAKE A CHANGE
I CAN'T BREATHE
BLACK LIVES MATTER
Black Lives matter
バイク乗り入れ禁止

UPBRINGING SHAPES THE SELF Being raised by parents who are active in the Black Lives Matter movement may increase children’s likelihood of a child developing an identity as someone who cares about racial justice.

The idea that we gain self-knowledge through reflected self-appraisals might seem to suggest that we have little say in how we see ourselves. But the key concept here is that we internalize how we *think* others perceive us, not necessarily how they *actually* see us. In fact, our reflected self-appraisals may not correlate as highly as you might assume with how other people evaluate us (Felson, 1993; Kenny & DePaulo, 1993; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979; Tice & Wallace, 2005). For example, far more people think they are shy than are actually perceived as shy by others (Zimbardo, 1990).

Figuring out how, and to what degree, reflected self-appraisals influence a person’s sense of self can be tricky. For example, Dakota’s view of herself as a clumsy person could stem from her perception that her family and friends see her this way and convey that impression to her. But it’s also possible that her view of herself as clumsy influences how other people see her, and they in turn convey that impression back to her. That is, the way we view ourselves often affects the perceptions of other people, who then reflect those views back to us in a kind of echo chamber (Felson, 1993; Kenny & DePaulo, 1993). Just how much overlap there is between people’s self-appraisals (how one sees the self) and their reflected appraisals (how one thinks others see the self) depends on a number of factors. For example, in later adolescence, there is greater overlap between self-appraisals and reflected appraisals than there is in early adolescence (Van der Cruijsen et al., 2019). There is also greater overlap, as you might imagine, in the self- and reflected appraisals of close friends than there is in the self- and reflected appraisals of acquaintances (e.g., Silva, Martins, & Calheiros, 2020).

> “Oh would some power the gift give us / To see ourselves as others see us.”
>
> —ROBERT BURNS

Situationism and the Social Self

In many films about the social lives of adolescents, teenage characters are portrayed as shifting who they are to conform with the people around them. Surrounded by their studious classmates, they readily compare homework notes and share gripes about the difficult test they had to take; in the presence of their school’s athletes, they convey nonchalance about their schoolwork. The chameleon-like nature of the teenagers in such films hints at a deeper truth: that our social self shifts from one situation to another. This notion that the social self changes across different contexts is consistent with the principle of *situationism*, and it’s supported by abundant empirical evidence.

ASPECTS OF THE SELF THAT ARE RELEVANT AND DISTINCTIVE IN THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

Students who are rebellious and free-spirited in the dorm may shift to a more sober and conservative demeanor around parents or professors. You might see yourself as relaxed and outspoken when with your close friends, but you’re as shy and inhibited when interacting with a group of new acquaintances. Hazel Markus and Elissa Wurf (1987) coined the term working self-concept to refer to the idea that only a subset of a person’s vast pool of self-knowledge is brought to mind in any given context—usually the subset that’s most relevant or appropriate in the current situation. Thus, for example, notions of the self associated with relationships are likely to be the mind’s chief focus when with a romantic partner, whereas notions of the self related to competition are likely to be at the forefront during a heated sports match.

CONTEXT AND SENSE OF SELF In the TV series *Girls*, the character Shoshanna Shapiro, played by actress Zosia Mamet, moves to Japan for a job. Here she is depicted walking around town in her newfound home, showing clear signs that her sense of self (including her fashion sense) has shifted to fit the context.

William McGuire and Alice Padawer-Singer (1976) proposed that we also tend to highlight what makes us unique or distinctive in any given situation. To test this hypothesis, they asked sixth-graders at different schools to describe themselves. On average, children wrote 12 statements referring to their recreational activities, attitudes, friends, and school activities. As it turned out, the children defined themselves with respect to how they differed from their classmates (**Figure 3.1**). Thirty percent of the children who were especially young or old compared with their classmates (that is, six months from the most common age of their classmates) mentioned their age in their self-definition, whereas only 19 percent of the other children did. Forty-four percent of the children who were born outside the United States mentioned this biographical fact, whereas only 7 percent of those born in the United States mentioned that fact about themselves. Twenty-six percent of the children of the minority gender in their class mentioned their gender as part of their self-definition compared with 11 percent of the majority gender (see also Cota & Dion, 1986). At least in the Western world, what’s most central to identity is what makes a person distinct.

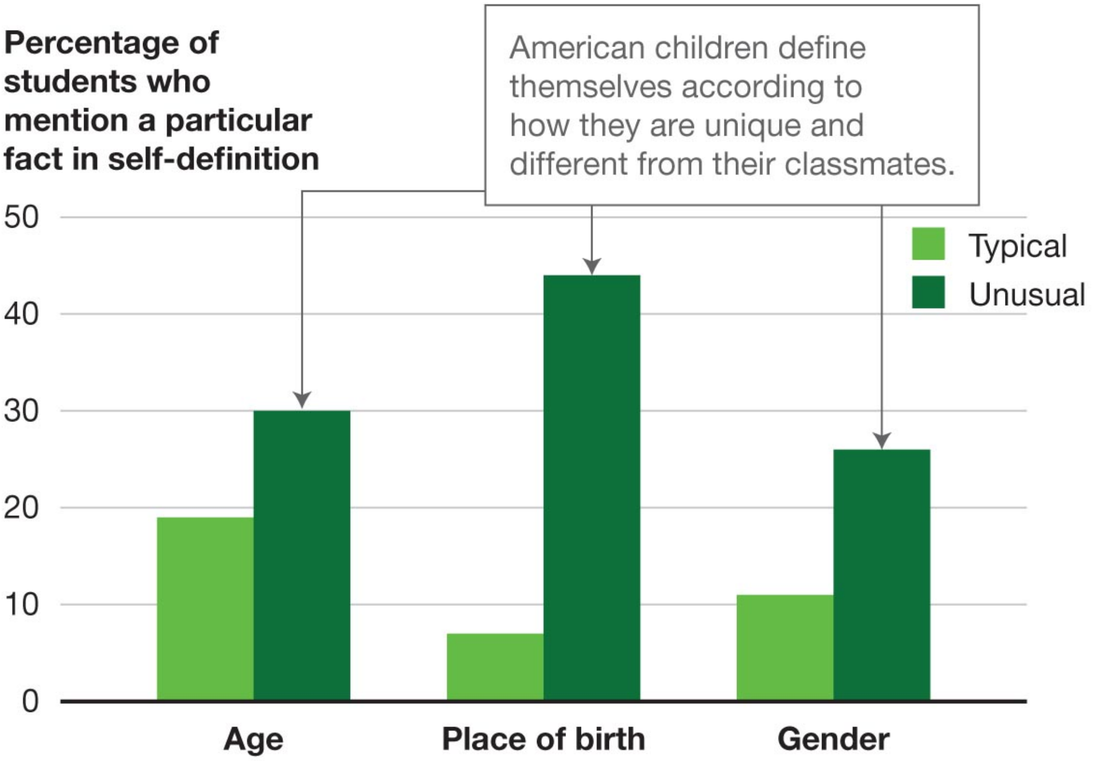


FIGURE 3.1 **DISTINCTIVENESS AND THE SENSE OF SELF** Source: Adapted from McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976.

MALLEABILITY AND STABILITY Most of us would readily agree that our sense of self shifts from one social context to another. Yet we also experience a sense of continuity in the self: the feeling that we have a stable, core self. How can we reconcile what appear to be dueling notions of malleability (that is, the idea that our self can be shaped) and stability in the self?

There are several ways to reconcile these two possibilities about the social self. First, although one’s working self-concept varies across situations, a person is likely to have core beliefs about the self that come to mind first when thinking about oneself (Markus, 1977). For example, although Kaya may see herself as painfully shy around strangers but outgoing with her friends, she sees herself as a good listener no matter whom she is around. For LGBTQ people, who sometimes face the decision of whether or not to disclose their LGBTQ status, their sexual orientation is likely to be a core, cross-situationally important aspect of the self (Cain, 1991).

Second, a person’s overall pool of self-knowledge remains relatively stable over time, providing a sense of self-continuity even as different dimensions of self-knowledge shift across different contexts (Andersen & Chen, 2002). Thus, your belief that you’re lazy may not be part of your working self-concept in a job interview, but it’s nonetheless stored in memory, ready to be retrieved when you’re lounging around streaming Netflix instead of cleaning the kitchen.

Finally, although a person’s sense of self may shift depending on the context, it’s likely that these shifts conform to a predictable, stable pattern (S. Chen, Boucher, & Tapias, 2006; English & Chen, 2007; Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Take a person who sees herself as confident around her friends but as insecure around her overly critical mother. Although this person’s sense of self clearly shifts according to the social context, it’s not as if she’s confident around her friends one day and insecure around them the next. In other words, the malleability in this individual’s self is itself *stable*. Whenever she is around her friends, she sees herself as confident, whereas being around her mother reliably shifts her self-concept to include being insecure. In short, the social self is defined by two truths: It is malleable, shifting from one context to another, but it also has core elements that persist across contexts.

Culture and the Social Self

The American Declaration of Independence and the *Analects* of the Chinese philosopher Confucius have shaped the lives of billions of people. Yet they reflect radically different ideas about the social self. The Declaration of Independence prioritized the rights and freedoms of the individual, and it maintained that those rights and liberties should not be infringed upon by a king. Confucius emphasized the importance of knowing one’s place in society; of honoring traditions, duties, and social roles; and of thinking of others before the self.

The different construals of the self reflected in these documents run deep in the cultures that people inhabit. In Western societies, people are concerned about their individuality, freedom, and self-expression. Western adages reflect this: “The squeaky wheel gets the grease”; “If you’ve got it, flaunt it.” In Asian cultures, homilies and folk wisdom encourage a different view of the self: “The empty wagon makes the most noise”; “The nail that stands up is pounded down.” Hazel Markus, Shinobu Kitayama, and Harry Triandis have offered far-reaching theories about how cultures vary in the social selves they encourage and how these different conceptions of the self shape the emotions we feel, the motivations that drive us, and our ways of perceiving the social world (Markus & Conner, 2013; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989, 1994, 1995).

> “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”
>
> —DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

> “A person of humanity, wishing to establish his own character, also establishes the character of others.”
>
> —CONFUCIUS

INDEPENDENT AND INTERDEPENDENT SELF-CONSTRUALS As discussed in Chapter 1, many Western cultures, especially those of northwestern Europe and former British colonies, such as Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, promote an *independent self-construal*. In these societies, the self is an autonomous entity that is distinct and separate from others. In **Figure 3.2A**, this autonomy is depicted as separate, nonoverlapping circles for the self and others. It’s important for people in these cultures to assert their uniqueness and independence, and the focus is on internal causes of behavior. These imperatives lead to a conception of the self in terms of traits that are stable across time and social context.

In contrast, most other cultures in the world foster *interdependent self-construals*, in which the self is fundamentally connected to other people, as illustrated in the overlap between the circles representing the self and others in **Figure 3.2B**. The imperatives are to find a place within the community and to fulfill appropriate roles. There is close attention to social contexts and a recognition of the shifting demands of situations on behaviors. These concerns lead to a conception of the self as something that is embedded within social relationships, roles, and duties. This kind of self-construal is prevalent in many East Asian cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), Eastern European cultures (De Freitas et al., 2017; Grossmann & Varnum, 2011; Realo & Allik, 1999; Tower, Kelly, & Richards, 1997), South Asian cultures (Dhawan et al., 1995; Savani, Markus, & Conner, 2008), African cultures (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997), and Latin American cultures (Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett, & Ybarra, 2000).

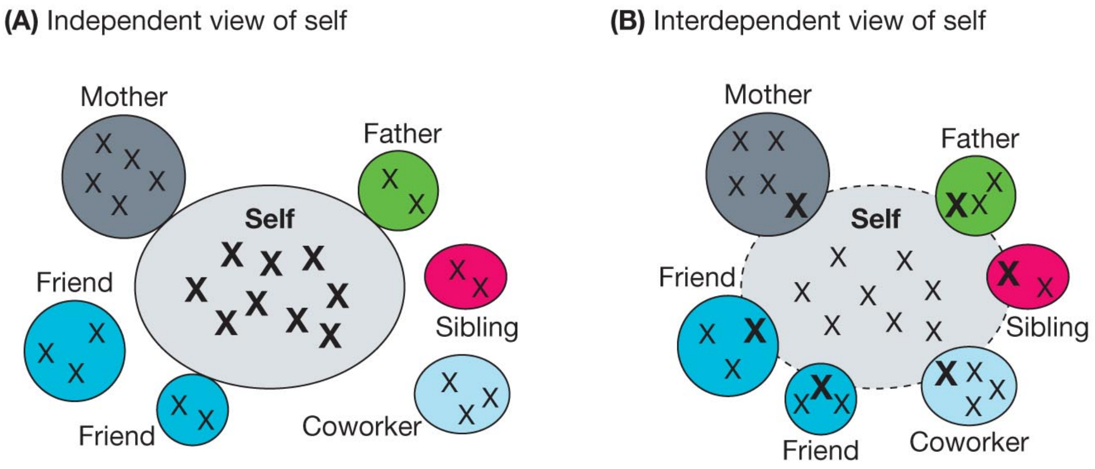
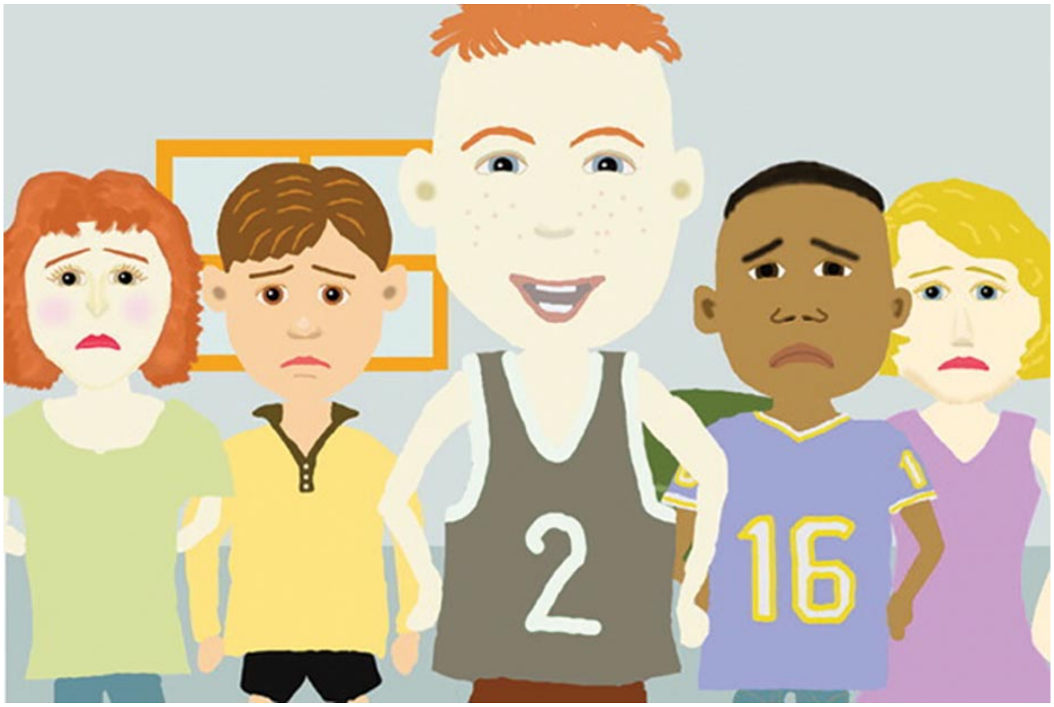

(A) Independent view of self
Mother
Father
Self
Friend
Sibling
Friend
Coworker
(B) Interdependent view of self
Mother
Father
Self
Friend
Sibling
Friend
Coworker

FIGURE 3.2 **VIEWS OF THE SELF** (A) In the independent view of the self, the self is construed as a distinct, autonomous entity, separate from others and defined by distinct traits and preferences (represented by nonshared Xs of the self versus others). (B) In the interdependent view of the self, the self is construed as connected to others and defined by duties, roles, and shared preferences and traits (represented by overlapping Xs of the self and others).

In short, an independent self-construal promotes an inward focus on the self, whereas an interdependent self-construal encourages an outward focus on the social situation. This difference in focus is reflected in the stories that members of different cultures construct about themselves. Dov Cohen and Alex Gunz (2002) asked Canadian and Asian students (including students from Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, Korea, and various South and Southeast Asian countries) to tell stories about ten different situations in which they were the center of attention—for example, a time when they were embarrassed. Canadians were more likely than Asians to reproduce the scene from their original point of view, looking outward from their own perspective. Asians were more likely to imagine the scene as an observer might, describing it from a third-person perspective. We might say that Westerners tend to experience and recall events from the inside out—with themselves at the center, looking out at the world. Easterners are more likely to experience and recall events from the outside in—starting from the social world, looking back at themselves as an object of attention. Westerners play the lead in their personal narratives; non-Westerners are more likely to be just one among many cast members. **Figure 3.3** provides another illustration of how Westerners and East Asians differ in the degree of attention they pay to the social context.



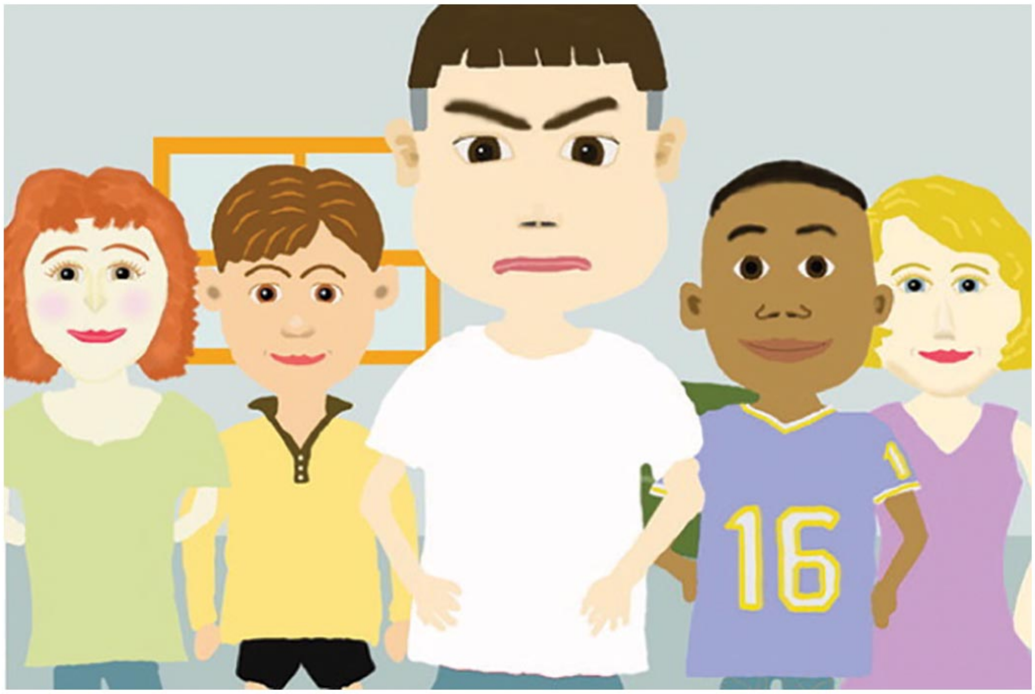


FIGURE 3.3 **CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN ATTENTION TO THE SOCIAL CONTEXT** In this study, American and Japanese participants were shown a series of cartoons with either a White boy (for Americans) or an Asian boy (for Japanese) in the center, surrounded by four other people who were the same in all the pictures (Masuda et al., 2008). In some cartoons, the emotional expression of the boy (for example, happy) matched the emotional expressions on the faces of the surrounding people (happy). In other cases, as in the two pictures shown here, there was a mismatch in the emotional expressions of the boy (for example, angry) and the others (happy). The researchers found that when judging an individual's emotions, the Japanese participants were more likely to take into account the emotions of others in the surrounding social context (e.g., their ratings of the boy's emotion were higher when the emotional expressions of the other people were the same as the boy's versus different from his).

WHO ARE YOU? The tendency of Westerners to construe themselves as self-contained is shown by simply asking them to describe themselves. Manford Kuhn and Thomas McPartland (1954) invented a simple "Who Am I?" exercise that asks people to list 20 statements that describe who they are. Americans' self-descriptions tend to be context-free responses referring to personality traits ("I'm friendly," "hardworking," "shy") and personal preferences ("I like dancing"). The responses of people from interdependent cultures tend to refer to relationships with other people or groups ("I am Sherman's friend") and are often qualified by context ("I am serious at work"; "I am fun-loving with my friends"; Cousins, 1989; Ip & Bond, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Vaunne Ma and Thomas Schoeneman (1997) gave the Who Am I? test to American university students and to four different groups living in Kenya: university students, workers in Nairobi (Kenya's capital city), and Indigenous Maasai and Samburu herding peoples. Kenya was for decades a colony of Great Britain, and city dwellers, especially those who are educated, have had a great deal of exposure to Western culture. Kenyan students have been exposed still more to Western culture and are being educated in a Western tradition. In contrast, Maasai and Samburu communities have had very little contact with Westerners.

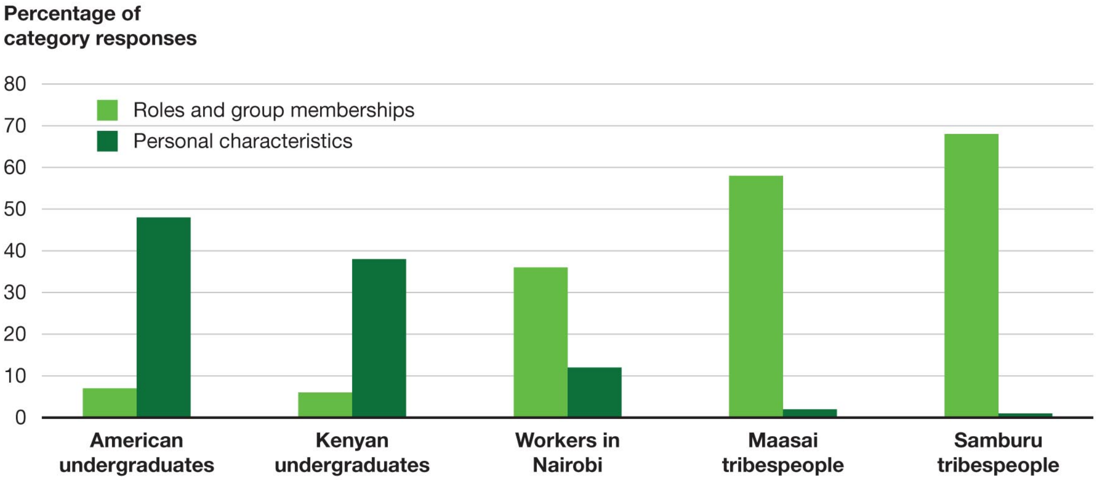


FIGURE 3.4 **SELF-CHARACTERIZATION IN FOUR KENYAN GROUPS** The results from this study suggest that Westernization is

associated with the development of a more independent self-construal. Source: Ma & Schoeneman, 1997

Figure 3.4 shows how differently these four African groups viewed themselves. Maasai and Samburu defined themselves in terms of their family, property, and position in the community. Tribespeople are constantly made aware of their roles and status in relation to family members and other groups (Mwaniki, 1973). Kenyan students, in contrast, were far more likely to mention personal characteristics. Kenyan students, in fact, differed only slightly from American students. Workers in Nairobi were in between the tribespeople and the students. These findings illustrate that different self-construals can emerge even among those who ostensibly live within the same “culture.” That is, culture is made up of more than just one’s country of residence. One’s occupation, educational institution, religion, race, socioeconomic status—each of these can exert its own cultural influences and shape self-construals in more independent or interdependent directions (Markus & Conner, 2013).

BOX 3.1

FOCUS ON CULTURE AND NEUROSCIENCE

Culture and the Social Self in the Brain

When people are asked to judge themselves with respect to various trait dimensions, a certain region of the brain known as the medial prefrontal cortex is particularly active (D’Argembeau, 2013), suggesting that this part of the frontal lobe is involved in processes that represent self-knowledge. Ying Zhu and his colleagues (2007) conducted a study using an interesting twist on this paradigm to ascertain whether many of the cultural differences in self-construal considered in this chapter would manifest in differences in neural activation. They had Chinese and Western European participants rate the applicability of different traits to themselves, their mothers, and another unrelated person. For members of both cultures, considering the applicability of the traits to themselves produced activation in the medial prefrontal cortex. But for Chinese participants, researchers also observed activation in this same region when participants were thinking about whether the traits characterized their mothers. For the Westerners, there was, if anything, a relative deactivation of the medial prefrontal cortex when they thought about their mothers. These findings suggest that for people with interdependent self-construals, the same region of the brain represents one’s self and one’s mother; they are merged within the brain. In contrast, for those with independent self-construals, one’s self and one’s mother are quite distinct, all the way down to which neurons are activated in the brain.

For example, research suggests that life in different socioeconomic subcultures in the United States promotes the elaboration of distinct construals of the self (Phillips et al., 2020; Stephens, Markus, & Phillips, 2014). Living in relatively higher-income environments, with their more abundant resources, safer neighborhoods, greater access to education, higher job security, and so on, affords people with the opportunity, if not the mandate, to develop selves that reflect the U.S. cultural ideal of independence. This independent self-construal emphasizes choice, freedom from constraint, the pursuit of opportunities, and self-expression.

In contrast, the culture of lower-income individuals in the United States is characterized by fewer resources, less safe neighborhoods, limited access to education, and tenuous job security. In such circumstances, it makes sense that people would develop selves that are more sensitive to the social context, to the constraints in their environment, and to their dependence on others. Among lower-income individuals, a more socially responsive, interdependent kind of self-construal is promoted.

Gender and the Social Self

Gender is yet another example of a cultural factor that has rich implications for self-construals. In a review of the literature on the self-concept and gender, Susan Cross and Laura Madson (1997) gathered evidence indicating that women in the United States tended to construe the self in more interdependent terms than men did—that is, in terms of connection to others. In contrast, men in the United States tended to prioritize difference and uniqueness, construing the self in more independent terms. The same gender differences were found among the Japanese (Kashima et al., 1992). Though these data were collected several decades ago, such gender differences are still commonly seen today in many contexts.

The evidence for these basic differences in self-construal is diverse. When women describe themselves, they are more likely than men to refer to social characteristics and relationships (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). When selecting photographs that are most revealing of who they are, women are more likely than men to choose photos that include other people, such as friends and family members (Clancy & Dollinger, 1993). In social interactions, women tend to be more empathic and better judges of other people’s personalities and emotions (Ambady, Hallahan, & Rosenthal, 1995; Bernieri et al., 1994; Davis & Franzoi, 1991; Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983; Hall, 1984). Men tend to be more attuned to their own internal responses, such as increased heart rate, whereas women are more attuned to situational cues, such as other people’s reactions (Pennebaker & Roberts, 1992; Roberts & Pennebaker, 1995).

Where do these gender differences in self-construal come from? Socialization processes are one influential source. Parents raise girls and boys differently. For example, parents tend to talk with their girls more than with their boys about emotions and being sensitive to others (Chaplin, 2015; Fivush, 1989; Kuebli & Fivush, 1992). The friendships that people form from the earliest ages also influence gender differences in self-construal. Starting at age 3 and continuing through the primary school years, girls and boys tend to play in gender-segregated groups that reinforce and amplify differences in self-construal (Maccoby, 1990). Girls tend to focus on cooperative games that are oriented toward interpersonal relationships (for example, playing mother and child). Boys tend to emphasize competition, hierarchy, and distinctions among individuals. As adults, gender-specific roles further amplify these differences. For example, even today, Western women tend to take on most of the responsibilities for raising children, which call on interdependent tendencies. These gendered roles are portrayed in the media as well, which tend to showcase men in positions of power and agency and women in more nurturing roles. These aspects of socialization tend to reinforce and enhance biological differences that make females more inclined to be nurturing and males more inclined to be competitive and aggressive.

That said, there are a number of important caveats and nuances to consider about the work on gender differences in self-construal. The first is that research in this area has taken a nearly exclusively binary approach, focusing solely on cisgender people. Second, in more recent years, researchers have taken a closer look at what it means to construe the self as connected to “others” (Baumeister & Sommer, 1997; Cross, Hardin, & Gercek-Swing, 2011), recognizing that “others” could refer to other individuals, such as close friends or coworkers, but could also refer to larger social entities, such as a favorite sports team and its fans, the student body as a whole at one’s school, one’s fellow citizens (e.g., fellow Americans), or like-minded religious believers (e.g., fellow Muslims). This suggests two distinct forms of interdependent self-construal: a relational one, focused on viewing the self as connected to other individuals, and a collective one, focused on viewing the self in relation to social groups or collectives. Interestingly, some evidence suggests that whereas women may be more inclined than men to hold and be shaped by a relational interdependent self-construal, men may be more apt to hold and be influenced by a collective interdependent self-construal (Gabriel & Gardner, 1999; Maddux & Brewer, 2005; Ratliff & Oishi, 2013). Such findings further underscore a core theme of this chapter—that the self is deeply social, even though there may be variation in what the biggest social influences on the self are.

Social Comparison

Sometimes people actively seek out information about themselves through comparison with other people. This is the central tenet of social comparison theory, an influential and enduring theory in social psychology put forward by Leon Festinger in the 1950s (Festinger, 1954; see also Suls & Wheeler, 2000; Wood, 1996). The theory maintains that when people have no objective standard by which to evaluate their traits or abilities, they do so largely by comparing themselves with others. Whether you are “physically strong” can be determined fairly objectively by simple tests of strength. But to be “honest” or “morally upright,” dimensions that are not so easy to quantify objectively, is to be more honest and morally upright than others.

> “It is not enough to succeed. Others must fail.”

—GORE VIDAL

Festinger noted, however, that there is no point in comparing yourself with someone like Jennifer Doudna, Nobel laureate in chemistry, or Serena Williams, among the most successful professional tennis players of all time, nor is it very helpful to compare yourself with total novices in domains that matter to you. To get an accurate sense of how good you are at something, you need to compare yourself with people who have roughly your level of skill. Numerous studies have shown that people are indeed especially drawn to comparisons with similar others (Kruglanski & Mayseless, 1990; Strickhouser & Zell, 2015; Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002). We like to feel good about ourselves, though, so our search for similar targets of comparison tends to be biased toward people who are slightly inferior. This is ironic because it puts us in the position of saying, “Compared with people who are slightly worse at tennis than I am, I’m pretty good!” or “Compared with people who are almost as conscientious as I am, I’m pretty darn conscientious!” These sorts of *downward* social comparisons help us define ourselves favorably and boost our self-esteem (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1993; Helgeson & Mickelson, 1995; Lockwood, 2002).

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SOCIAL COMPARISONS It's not informative to compare your intelligence or athletic skill to someone renowned for brilliance, such as Jennifer Doudna, or celebrated for tennis-playing ability, like Serena Williams.

But if we only engage in downward social comparison, we can become complacent and may sacrifice opportunities for bettering ourselves (“Well, I’m more anti-racist than Steven and Sandra are, so I don’t need to worry about doing better.”). In fact, when we focus on improving ourselves, we tend to forgo the self-esteem benefits of downward social comparison and engage in *upward* social comparison instead (Sedikides & Hepper, 2009). For example, in one study of ninth-graders, researchers found that students usually chose to compare their grades with those of someone who had slightly better grades than they did, presumably with the hope that one day they might get higher grades themselves (Blanton et al., 1999).

> “I do not try to dance better than anyone else. I only try to dance better than myself.”
>
> —MIKHAIL BARYSHNIKOV

In today’s social media–saturated world, we can find ourselves inundated with social comparison “opportunities.” Pictures of your friend’s blissful romantic relationship pop up on your Instagram feed. Your smartphone pings to let you know that your neighbor has just shared a lively video of friends and family dancing the night away at a birthday celebration this past weekend. A former classmate tweets that he just landed a new job. You wouldn’t be alone if such events made you wonder: Why am I not in a relationship? Is my relationship as perfect as other people’s relationships? Was my weekend really that much fun? How much more or less successful am I? This self-doubt raises the question of whether exposing yourself to all this social media is good or bad for you.

Researchers have begun to tackle this question. In one study, Philippe Verduyn and colleagues (2015) text-messaged participants five times a day over a 6-day period, prompting them to fill out a survey upon receiving each text. The survey asked participants to make a series of ratings, including their current affective well-being (how positive or negative they felt), their amount of passive Facebook use since the last text (for example, scrolling through their news feed), their amount of active Facebook use since the last text (for example, posting and sharing content), and finally, in an effort to measure social comparison, their current feelings of envy. The findings suggest that passive (but not active) Facebook use makes people feel less upbeat and that this is due in part to feelings of envy, presumably triggered by comparing their own lives with the images of other people’s lives splashed all over their Facebook feeds. Results like these point to social media as a potentially major social influence on construals and evaluations of the self.

Group Memberships

Earlier we talked about how different cultural backgrounds—such as those associated with a person’s country of origin, race, or religion—can shape the self in a more independent or interdependent direction. But being, say, Canadian, mixed-race, or Muslim can influence how people define themselves in other ways. There is a part of each of us that is defined by our group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)—what social psychologists often refer to as social identities—and these identities can shape who we are on more than just the independent-interdependent dimension. Social identities are what people are referring to when they declare “I am a Republican,” “I am gay,” or “I am Latinx.” Note that a person who votes Republican may not necessarily view being Republican as a social identity. Instead, people choose which social groups they see as part of their sense of self, and even among people who all lay claim to the same social identity, there will be variation in how central or important that identity is to each individual (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Sellers et al., 1998).

One of the most basic ways that social identities influence a person's sense of self is via self-stereotyping, which refers to characterizing the self in terms of the traits, norms, and values associated with an especially salient or meaningful social group (e.g., Biernat, Vescio, & Green, 1996; Laurin, Kay, & Shepherd, 2011; Pickett, Bonner, & Coleman, 2002; E. R. Smith & Henry, 1996). Thus, for example, when a woman proclaims that she is a Californian, she defines herself by her perception of what it means to be a member of that group: laid-back, eco-friendly, and liberal. Importantly, social identities follow the same "rules" of malleability that hold for any other aspect of the self—that is, different contexts bring to mind different social identities. For example, a young woman entering a voting booth might find that her political identity is top of mind, but once she leaves the booth and shows up for soccer practice, her identity as part of a team predominates. Or, a gender-nonbinary person becomes very aware of their sexual identity when the conversation turns to the use of pronouns during a happy hour with work colleagues. We will return to a discussion of social identities—including how stigmatized social identities can profoundly shape our daily social interactions and outcomes—when we consider the topics of stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and intergroup relations in Chapters 10 and 11.

LOOKING BACK

The social self originates from a variety of sources. Socialization agents—by virtue of what they teach us, what they encourage in us, and how they react to us—help define who we are. The current situation matters as well: The social self shifts from one context to another. A person’s cultural background (country of residence, gender, race, social class) shapes the social self in profound ways, leading one to define the self in more independent terms, with an emphasis on uniqueness and autonomy, or in more interdependent terms, with an emphasis on connection to other individuals and social groups. Finally, the social self is shaped by comparisons with other people and by the social identities that people claim.

Glossary

reflected self-appraisal

A belief about what others think of one’s self.

working self-concept

A subset of self-knowledge that is brought to mind in a particular context.

social comparison theory

The idea that people compare themselves to other people to obtain an accurate assessment of their own opinions, abilities, and internal states.

social identities

The parts of a person’s sense of self that are derived from group memberships.

self-stereotyping

The phenomenon whereby people come to define themselves in terms of traits, norms, and values that they associate with a social group when their identity as a member of that group is salient.

Self-Esteem

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Define self-esteem and explain how it is affected by successes and failures in different domains.
- Describe some cultural differences in self-esteem.

In 1987, California governor George Deukmejian signed Assembly Bill 3659 into law. The bill allocated an annual budget of $245,000 for a self-esteem task force charged with two goals: understanding the effects of self-esteem on drug use, teenage pregnancy, and high school dropout rates and elevating the self-esteem of schoolchildren. The initiative was based on the assumption that strengthening self-esteem would help cure society’s ills.

Several findings would seem to support this assumption. People with low self-esteem are less satisfied with life, more hopeless, and more depressed (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001), and they are less able to cope with life’s challenges, such as the social and academic demands of college (Cutrona, 1982). They tend to disengage from tasks following failure (Brockner, 1979), and they are more prone to antisocial behavior and delinquency (Donnellan et al., 2005). Raising self-esteem, the thinking was, just might produce healthier, more resilient children and a better society in the long run. The data that the California legislators relied on were mostly correlational in nature, which means we can’t conclude that self-esteem had a *causal* effect on any of the other variables. And there are many complexities to drawing the unqualified conclusion that high self-esteem is always good, as self-esteem has many dimensions. There is even debate about what exactly self-esteem is. We will touch on these topics below. Regardless, the topic of self-esteem has attracted considerable attention from social psychologists.

Defining Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to the overall positive or negative evaluation people have of themselves. Researchers usually evaluate self-esteem with simple self-report measures like the scale in **Table 3.1**. As you can see from this scale, self-esteem represents how we feel about our attributes and qualities, our successes and failures, and our self in general. People with high self-esteem feel quite good about themselves. People with low self-esteem feel ambivalent about themselves; they tend to feel both good and bad about who they are. People who truly dislike themselves are rare and are typically found in specific clinical populations, such as severely depressed individuals.

TABLE 3.1 SELF-ESTEEM SCALE

Indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements by using the scale below.			
0 Strongly Disagree	1 Disagree	2 Agree	3 Strongly Agree
____ 1. At times I think I am no good at all.			
____ 2. I take a positive view of myself.			

____ 3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.

____ 4. I wish I could have more respect for myself.

____ 5. I certainly feel useless at times.

____ 6. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.

____ 7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

____ 8. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

____ 9. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

____ 10. I am able to do things as well as most other people.

To determine your score, first reverse the scoring for the five negatively worded items (1, 3, 4, 5, and 8) as follows: 0 = 3, 1 = 2, 2 = 1, 3 = 0. Then, add up your scores across the ten items. Your total score should fall between 0 and 30. Higher numbers indicate higher self-esteem.

Source: M. Rosenberg, 1965.

Trait self-esteem is a person’s enduring level of self-regard across time. Studies indicate that trait self-esteem is fairly stable. People who report high trait self-esteem at one point in time tend to report high trait self-esteem many years later; people who report low trait self-esteem at one point tend to report low trait self-esteem later on (Block & Robins, 1993).

State self-esteem refers to the dynamic, changeable self-evaluations a person experiences as momentary feelings about the self (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). Much as your working self-concept changes from one context to the next, so too can your state self-esteem. When people experience a setback, their self-esteem is likely to take a dive—especially among those who have low self-esteem to begin with (J. D. Brown & Dutton, 1995). For example, when college students watch their beloved college football team lose, their feelings of personal competence often drop (Hirt et al., 1992). And children of average intelligence have lower self-esteem when they’re in a classroom with academically talented children than they do when they’re with children who have lower academic abilities (H. W. Marsh & Parker, 1984). Self-esteem also shifts during different stages of development. As males move from early adolescence (age 14) to early adulthood (age 23), their self-esteem tends to rise. During the same period, females’ self-esteem tends to fall (Block & Robins, 1993).

ELEVATING SELF-ESTEEM People in the self-esteem movement believe it is important for all children to have high self-esteem so that they will be happy and healthy. They have encouraged teachers to make every child a VIP for a day and coaches to give medals or trophies to every child who plays on a team, whether the team wins or loses.

> "Life is not easy for any of us. But what of that? We must have perseverance and above all confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something and that this thing must be attained."
>
> —MARIE CURIE

Success and failure in different domains do not affect everyone equally. Some people attach more importance to doing well in some domains (such as popularity, academics, physical appearance, or moral virtue) than in others. According to Jennifer Crocker’s contingencies of self-worth model, people’s self-esteem rises and falls with successes and failures in the domains that are most important to their self-worth. In other words, self-esteem goes up when you do well in areas that matter to you, but it drops when you stumble in these areas. In a test of this prediction, researchers studied the self-esteem of University of Michigan students who had applied to graduate school (Crocker, Sommers, & Luhtanen, 2002). Students filled out a self-esteem questionnaire every day that they received an acceptance or rejection from a university. Not surprisingly, students had higher self-esteem on days when they received an acceptance and lower self-esteem on days when they received a rejection. But these effects were much larger for those students whose self-esteem was highly dependent on academic competence. These findings suggest that it’s probably wise for people to stake their self-worth in a wide range of areas—perhaps on academic achievement, but also on the strength of their friendships and family relationships, their ability to play a particular sport or musical instrument, their concern for the feelings of others, and so on—rather than put all their eggs in one basket. Indeed, studies suggest that the more we derive our self-worth from multiple, distinct domains, the more likely we are to avoid feeling devastated by a setback in any one domain (Linville, 1987; Showers, 1992).

Social Acceptance and Self-Esteem

MOTHER GOOSE

“So, when he says, ‘What a good boy am I,’ Jack is really reinforcing his self-esteem.”

Several of the domains that define people’s self-worth (for example, social approval) are highly social in nature. In his sociometer hypothesis, Mark Leary maintains that self-esteem is not so much a gauge of one’s evaluation of the self as it is a readout of our social standing; that is, self-esteem is an internal, subjective index of how well we are regarded by others and hence how likely we are to be included or excluded by them (Leary et al., 1995). Throughout most of evolutionary history, Leary reasons, we couldn’t go it alone; therefore, we needed a way to quickly assess how we were doing socially. Our feelings of state self-esteem constitute just such an assessment.

Leary notes that the things that make us feel good about ourselves—feeling likable, competent, physically attractive, and morally upright—are precisely the characteristics that make others accept us (or reject us if we fall short). High self-esteem indicates that we are thriving in our relationships; low self-esteem suggests that we are having interpersonal difficulties. In this sense, low self-esteem is not something to be avoided at all costs. Rather, it provides useful information about when we need to attend to and shore up our social bonds.

Culture and Self-Esteem

Many East Asian languages have no word or phrase for self-esteem. The Japanese have a term now, but like the Japanese rendering for *baseball*—namely, *beisoboru*—the word for *self-esteem* is simply borrowed from English: *serufu esutiimu*. That it was Westerners who invented the term *self-esteem* reflects a long-standing concern in the West with the value of the individual. During the Enlightenment period in the eighteenth century, Western Europeans began to prioritize individuality, freedom, and rights—ideas that would weave their way into the U.S. Constitution (Baumeister, 1987; Seligman, 1988; Twenge, 2002). Today, the emphasis on self-esteem in the West is higher than ever. Countless books have been published with advice about the importance of having a strong sense of self-worth. Modern American parents want to raise independent and confident children—not the obedient children of 50 years ago (Remley, 1988).

> “Independence is happiness.”
>
> —SUSAN B. ANTHONY

Independent cultures foster higher levels of self-esteem than interdependent cultures do. Compared with the world’ s more interdependent peoples—from Japan to Malaysia to India to Kenya—Westerners report higher self-esteem and a more pronounced concern with evaluating the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; D. P. Schmitt & Allik, 2005). It’ s not that people who define the self in more interdependent terms feel bad about themselves. Rather, they’ re more concerned with other ways of feeling good about themselves—for example, they’ re motivated toward self-improvement and commitment to collective goals (Crocker & Park, 2004; Heine, 2005; Norenzayan & Heine, 2005). Interestingly, as people from interdependent cultures are increasingly exposed to the West, the independent emphasis on self-worth rubs off on them, and their self-esteem rises. As shown in **Figure 3.5**, as Asians become more immersed in Canadian life, they become more like Canadians overall with respect to self-esteem (Heine & Lehman, 2003).

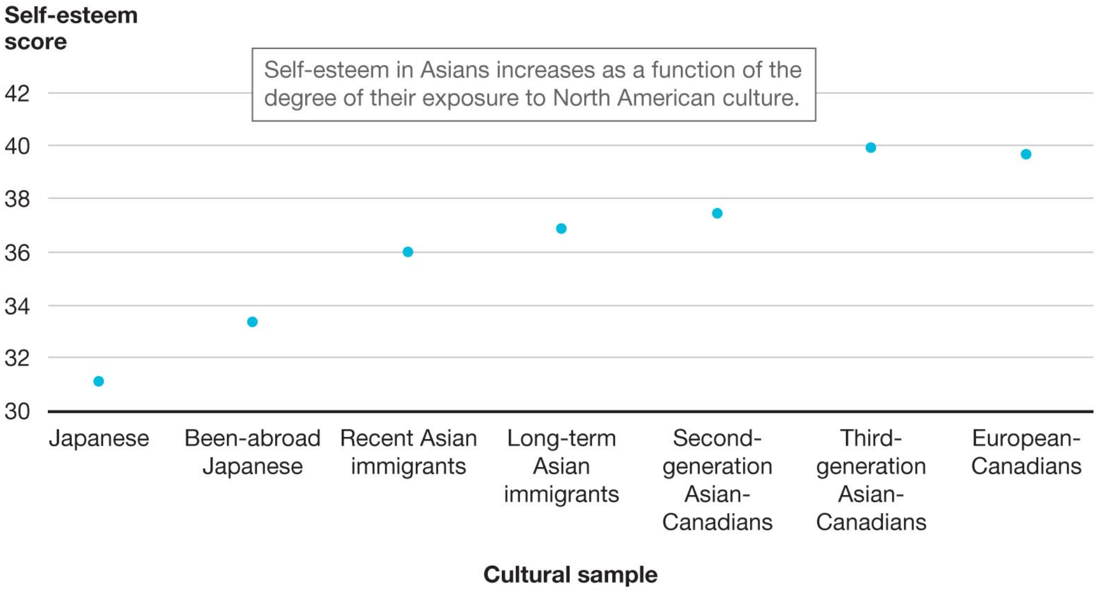


FIGURE 3.5 **CULTURAL CHANGE AND SHIFTS IN SELF-ESTEEM** The graph represents the average self-esteem score of a number of groups. Japanese were those living in Japan. Been-abroad Japanese were those who had spent time in a Western culture. Recent Asian immigrants were those who had moved

to Canada within the seven years prior to the study. Long-term Asian immigrants had lived in Canada for more than seven years. Second-generation Asian-Canadians were born in Canada to parents who were born in Asia. Third-generation Asian-Canadians were born in Canada, and their parents were born in Canada, but their grandparents were born in Asia. European-Canadians were Canadians with European ancestors. Source: Adapted from Heine & Lehman, 2003.

What is it about independent and interdependent cultures that creates these differences in how we feel about ourselves? A situationist hypothesis would hold that people from independent cultures create social interactions that boost self-esteem. Consistent with this notion, studies have found that situations described by Japanese people as common daily experiences are seen as less conducive to high self-esteem—by both Japanese and Americans—than daily situations in the United States (Kitayama et al., 1997). For example, Japanese people are encouraged to engage in “assisted” self-criticism more often than Americans are. Japanese math teachers and sushi chefs critique themselves in sessions with their peers—not the sort of activity that tends to build self-esteem, however beneficial it might be to skill development. Situations Americans reported as typical, by contrast, are seen by both Americans and Japanese people to be more esteem enhancing. For example, Americans are more often praised for their achievements than Japanese people are.

CULTURE AND SELF-ESTEEM Japanese students are encouraged to focus more on how they can improve than on how to feel good about themselves, an emphasis that may help explain cultural differences in levels of self-esteem.

Cultural differences in emphasis on promoting self-esteem versus improving the self can have important consequences for how people respond to failures and setbacks. Steven Heine and his colleagues asked Canadian and Japanese students to take a so-called creativity test and then gave them false performance feedback (Heine et al., 2001). Some students were told they had performed well, whereas others were told they had performed badly. The experimenters then gave the participants the opportunity to work on a similar task. The Canadians worked longer on the second task if they had succeeded at the first; the Japanese worked longer if they had failed. The Canadians thus avoided being reminded of failure, and the Japanese used the occasion to improve.

LOOKING BACK

Self-esteem refers to the positive or negative evaluations people have of themselves. Trait self-esteem is fairly stable, whereas state self-esteem fluctuates across different situations. People have different contingencies of self-worth, or domains in which they invest their self-esteem. These lead to rises or declines in self-esteem when people succeed or fail, respectively, in these domains. According to the sociometer hypothesis, self-esteem is a gauge of a person’s standing with others and thus a useful potential warning about the possibility of rejection. People who construe the self in more interdependent terms are less concerned with feeling positively about their attributes than are modern Westerners, who define the self in more independent terms. Defining the self in interdependent terms is also associated with being more likely to seek opportunities for self-improvement.

Glossary

self-esteem

The overall positive or negative evaluation people have of themselves.

contingencies of self-worth

The thesis that people’s self-esteem is contingent on their successes and failures in domains they deem important to their self-worth.

sociometer hypothesis

The idea that self-esteem is an internal, subjective index or marker of the extent to which a person is included or looked on favorably by others.

Motives Driving Self-Evaluation

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Distinguish between self-enhancement and self-verification.
- List some strategies people may use to serve self-enhancement motives and the circumstances in which people tend to favor one over the other.
- Summarize debates about whether self-enhancement is good or bad for well-being.

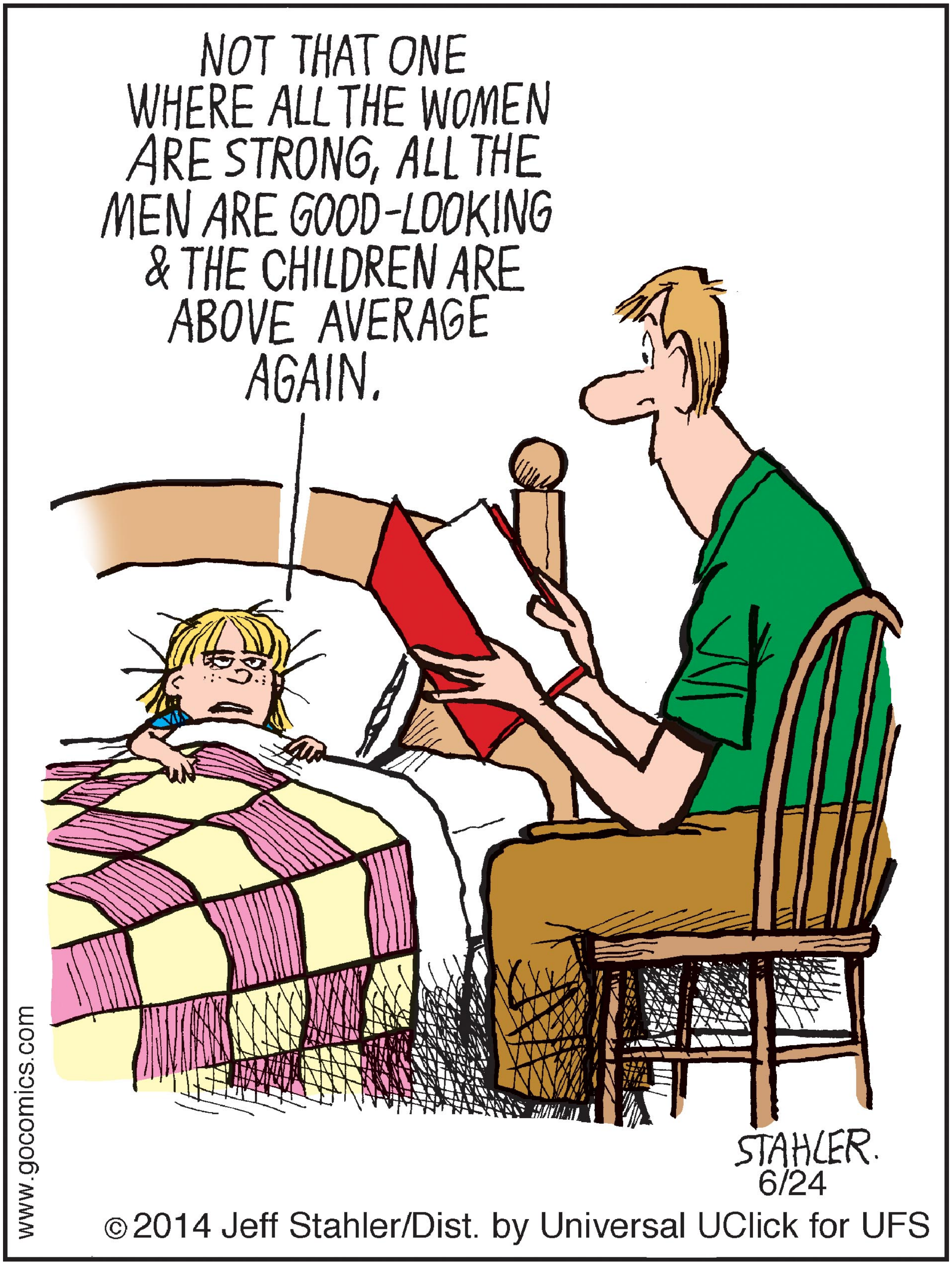
Implicit in our discussion of self-esteem is the fact that people are motivated to view themselves positively. This motive, known as self-enhancement, influences many dynamics of self-evaluation, including how people respond to negative feedback about their own personality and what kinds of information they seek out. Another motive guiding self-evaluation is self-verification.

Self-Enhancement

> **MOTIVATIONS BEHIND SELF-EVALUATION** Everyone spends some time evaluating their abilities and skills, but different motives can drive these evaluations. When you scrutinize yourself, do you take a self-critical stance, or do you evaluate yourself through rose-colored glasses?

Suppose you just found out that your romantic interest in a coworker is not reciprocated, or you recently received a less than stellar performance appraisal at work. Naturally, you’re going to feel bad about yourself and will probably try to find ways to feel better. In other words, there will be a need for self-enhancement, the desire to maintain, increase, or protect positive views of the self (Leary, 2007; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). To satisfy this very powerful motive, people use various strategies.

SELF-SERVING CONSTRUALS As we’ve already discussed, most people—or at least most Westerners—tend to view themselves positively. In fact, when asked to indicate how they compare with others, people exhibit a pronounced better-than-average effect: They think they are above average in popularity, kindness, fairness, leadership, and so on (Alicke & Govorun, 2005). And it will probably not surprise you to learn that most people think they are above-average drivers. A majority of drivers interviewed while hospitalized for being in an automobile accident rated their driving skill as closer to “expert” than to “poor” (C. E. Preston & Harris, 1965; Svenson, 1981).


NOT THAT ONE WHERE ALL THE WOMEN ARE STRONG, ALL THE MEN ARE GOOD-LOOKING & THE CHILDREN ARE ABOVE AVERAGE AGAIN.
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Why are people so flattering when it comes to thinking about themselves? Part of the answer has to do with how people interpret what it means to be kind, fair, athletic, or even a good driver. That is, self-serving interpretations of these kinds of traits are one means of pursuing self-enhancement. As Nobel Prize–winning economist Thomas Schelling once stated:

> Everybody ranks himself high in qualities he values; careful drivers give weight to care, skillful drivers give weight to skill, and those who think that, whatever else they are not, at least they are polite, give weight to courtesy, and come out high on their own scale. This is the way that every child has the best dog on the block. (Schelling, 1978, p. 64)

David Dunning and his colleagues have shown that people form just these sorts of self-serving interpretations, or construals, of what it means to be, say, artistic, athletic, or agreeable and that such construals are an important part of the better-than-average effect. They have found, for example, that people are more likely to think they are significantly above average on ambiguous traits that are easy to construe in multiple ways (artistic, sympathetic) than on unambiguous ones that are not (tall, punctual). Also, when people are given precise instructions about how they should interpret what it means to be, for instance, artistic or athletic, the better-than-average effect shrinks in size (Dunning, Meyerowitz, & Holzberg, 1989).

People also take advantage of another type of ambiguity that allows them to think highly of themselves: the ambiguity concerning which behaviors or characteristics “count” in determining what someone is like. People tend to judge *other* people—how kind, outgoing, or athletic they are—by the way they are on average, yet they define *themselves* in terms of how they behave when they’re at their best. If people (unknowingly) juggle the standards for what it means to be talented, considerate, or agreeable, it should come as no surprise that they think of themselves as above average (E. F. Williams & Gilovich, 2012; E. F. Williams, Gilovich, & Dunning, 2012).

SELF-AFFIRMATION Affirmations are another strategy for maintaining a positive view of the self (Steele, 1988). Self-affirmation theory focuses on people's efforts to maintain an overall sense of self-worth when confronted with feedback or events that threaten a valued self-image, such as getting a poor test grade or learning that they're at risk for a certain illness. Under these circumstances, people can maintain an overall sense of self-worth by affirming themselves in a domain unrelated to the threatened domain. For instance, if you learn of threatening health information—say, you've just read a news report describing a COVID outbreak associated with a weekend festival you attended—you can restore your self-esteem by reminding yourself of, say, your work ethic or your close ties with your family.

Numerous empirical studies suggest that self-affirmation works (McQueen & Klein, 2006; D. K. Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Moreover, self-affirmations have been shown to do more than simply help people maintain a general sense of self-worth. They also help minimize a wide range of defensive, and potentially harmful, behaviors that people exhibit when faced with threat, such as the tendency to take responsibility for successes but deny responsibility for failures (D. K. Sherman & Cohen, 2006). When encountering threats to self-esteem, people often defensively put down members of stereotyped groups (Fein & Spencer, 1997). This is less likely to occur if people affirm a valued aspect of themselves prior to evaluating stereotyped group members. In the domain of health awareness, studies have shown that after affirming the self, people are more receptive to troubling, but potentially useful, health information, resulting in a greater likelihood that they will engage in healthy behaviors (D. A. K. Sherman, Nelson, & Steele, 2000).

BOX 3.2

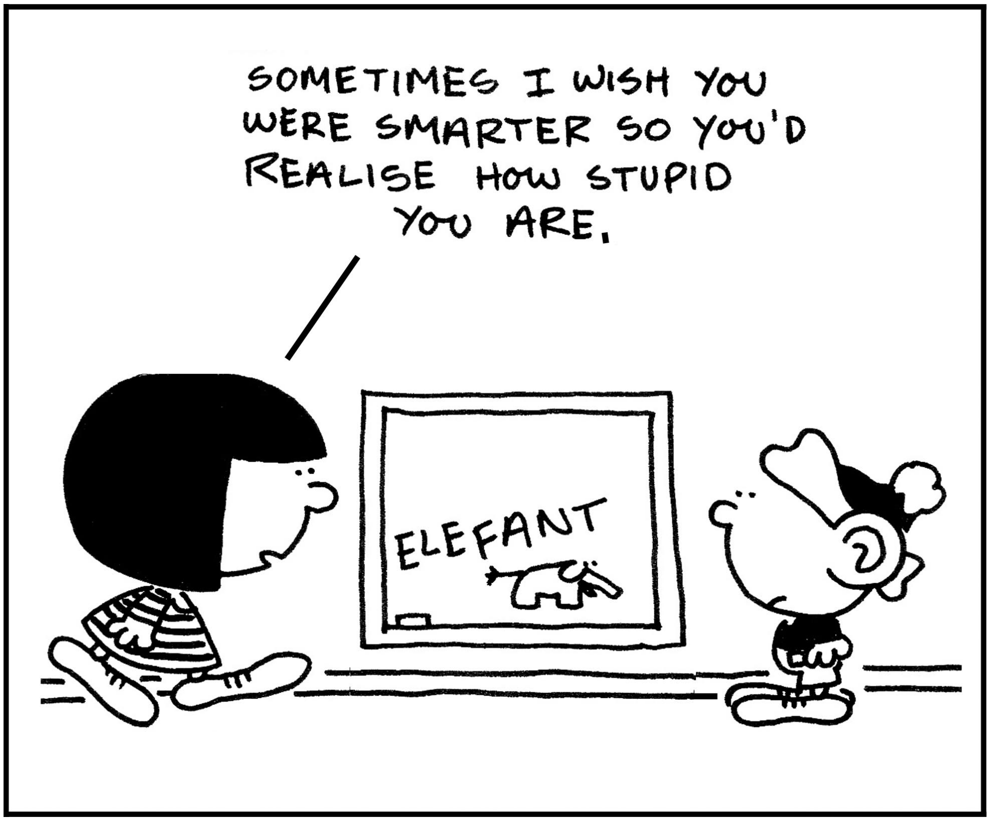
Not So Fast: **Critical Thinking About Assuming a Single Explanation**

Consider what the following decisions have in common: applying only to highly selective law schools, ignoring the physical therapy your doctor prescribed, pursuing a career in music instead of accounting. Each decision involves a decidedly favorable assessment of your traits and abilities. We’ve learned how strong the desire for self-enhancement tends to be (especially among members of Western cultures) and how adept people are at satisfying that desire. But while it is tempting to assume that the desire for self-enhancement alone accounts for people’s inflated self-assessments, other, nonmotivational factors may in fact be at play.

One cognitive barrier to accurate self-assessment is the simple fact that people don’t always have access to all the information they need to appraise their traits and abilities accurately. Of course, we don’t have access to nonconscious processes, but we may also lack basic knowledge related to the trait or ability in question. Justin Kruger, David Dunning, and their colleagues offer a particularly clear example of this deficiency, what they call the double curse of incompetence (Dunning, Heath, & Suls, 2004; J. M.

Kruger & Dunning, 1999). The curse is that incompetent people—that is, those who tend to perform well below their peers in a given domain—are deficient not only in the skills needed to perform better but also in the very knowledge necessary for accurately recognizing their incompetence. We all know of students who walk out of an exam room certain they’ve aced the test only to find out a few days later that they bombed it. The skills and knowledge that would have led to a better test score are pretty much the same skills and knowledge required for accurately predicting how they did on the test in the first place.

So, before concluding that someone’s overly flattering self-assessment is a clear sign of a hefty appetite for self-enhancement, it’s important to consider other, less motivational sources of flawed self-appraisal. Lacking the skills and knowledge needed to make more accurate self-assessments is just one of these sources, but other possibilities exist. For example, in an effort to be polite, other people tend to provide us with overly positive estimates of our abilities and traits. To the extent that’s true, we can scarcely be blamed for overestimating our abilities and the attractiveness of our personality.


SOMETIMES I WISH YOU WERE SMARTER SO YOU'D REALISE HOW STUPID YOU ARE.
ELEFANT

SELF-ENHANCEMENT AND WELL-BEING Given people’s robust tendency to resort to various strategies to view themselves in a positive light, we may wonder whether having a truly honest and accurate understanding of oneself instead might be better for a person’s mental health and happiness.

In a provocative line of work, Shelley Taylor and Jonathon Brown challenged this position. They argue that self-knowledge often includes positive illusions about the self—that we are funnier, smarter, or warmer than we really are—and that such illusions, far from being detrimental, actually enhance well-being (S. E. Taylor & Brown, 1988, 1994; Updegraff & Taylor, 2000). Dozens of studies carried out with Europeans and North Americans have shown that people who are well adjusted are more prone to various illusions about the self than are those who suffer from low self-esteem and unhappiness.

In a laboratory context, Taylor and her colleagues examined whether positive illusions about the self are related to physiological responses to stress (S. E. Taylor et al., 2003). Participants who were more likely to hold positive illusions about themselves (high self-enhancers) and participants who were less likely to hold positive illusions about themselves (low self-enhancers) faced several stress-inducing tasks (such as counting backward by sevens from 9,095). During these stressful tasks, their biological responses to stress were recorded. High self-enhancers coped with the stress more effectively, exhibiting lower baseline levels of cortisol (the stress hormone) and less cardiovascular arousal than low self-enhancers during the stressful tasks.

Other researchers have questioned the notion that positive illusions promote good adjustment and health, arguing instead that accurate rather than false self-beliefs foster well-being and other positive outcomes (Colvin & Block, 1994; Colvin & Griffo, 2008). They cite research showing that people who rate themselves more favorably than others do (that is, people who self-enhance) are perceived by others as narcissistic (John & Robins, 1994). To the degree that these perceptions have some basis in reality, this bodes poorly for self-enhancers (and society) in light of evidence linking narcissism to various forms of maladaptive and harmful behavior, including aggression (Kjærvik & Bushman, 2021; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Other studies demonstrate that people who hold relatively accurate views of themselves, in that their ratings of themselves are similar to others’ ratings of them, are judged by others more positively than are people who self-enhance (Colvin, Block, & Funder, 1995).

Perhaps the greatest challenge to Taylor and Brown’s positive illusion thesis comes from cross-cultural research. This work demonstrates that East Asians are less likely than Westerners to endorse positive illusions about the self (Heine et al., 1999; Kitayama et al., 1997). In one study, Japanese college students were less likely than American students to assume that they were better than average in important abilities, such as academic talent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Such cross-cultural evidence suggests that positive illusions do not automatically enhance well-being. They often do so for Westerners because a positive view of the self is a cherished cultural value in the West. In contrast, personal well-being for East Asians appears to be more closely tied to interdependent values, such as fulfilling social roles and meeting others' expectations. This finding is consistent with data suggesting the prevalence of an interdependent self-construal among East Asians (Suh et al., 1998).

So, are self-enhancing tendencies adaptive or not? Do they benefit the individual? The answer to this question is still being debated (Schimmack & Kim, 2020), with one possible answer being: It depends. In one study, Robins and Beer (2001) showed that students who entered college with self-enhancing beliefs about their academic ability reported higher average levels of self-esteem and well-being over a four-year period relative to their non-enhancing peers. However, self-enhancement tendencies were associated with a downward trajectory over the four-year period for both self-esteem and well-being. In essence, although self-enhancement was linked to greater self-esteem and well-being in the short term, the advantages linked to self-enhancement eroded over time.

A more recent contribution to this debate suggests other factors that matter. Self-enhancement may have a more straightforward, positive relationship with personal well-being measures (e.g., life satisfaction) than with interpersonal measures (e.g., how much one is valued by others). The length of one's acquaintance with evaluators also makes a difference: Self-enhancement appears to be more positively related to favorable evaluations from strangers than from longer-term acquaintances (Dufner et al., 2019). Overall, the safest conclusion to draw at this point is that whether and how much self-enhancement provides benefits depends on a range of factors, and at times, enhancing the self can be taken too far and exact tangible costs (Makridakis & Moleskis, 2015).

Self-Verification

Although self-enhancement clearly is a powerful motive for self-evaluation, we don’t always want to see ourselves through rose-colored glasses. The truth, at least our version of it, also matters. According to self-verification theory, sometimes we strive for stable, subjectively accurate beliefs about ourselves rather than invariably favorable ones (Swann, 1990). Stable and accurate self-views make us more predictable to ourselves and others, which helps social interactions go more smoothly. More concretely, we strive to get others to confirm or verify our preexisting beliefs about ourselves. For example, if you see yourself as extraverted, self-verification theory predicts that you will try to get others to see you as extraverted as well. This holds true even for negative self-views: If you truly believe you are, say, socially awkward or shy, getting others to see this truth about who you are bolsters your feelings of coherence and predictability. Imagine how unsettling it would be for a close friend to see you as not at all shy and, worse still, to put you in situations that are uncomfortable for a shy person—such as volunteering you to give a toast at a party or to sing karaoke. You’d be likely to feel like this friend just doesn’t “get you.”

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24
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IDENTITY CUES AND SELF-VERIFICATION We create self-confirming social environments through the clothes we wear, hairstyles, jewelry, tattoos, and other identity cues. (A) A high school student wears his varsity jacket off the field, signaling his identity as an athlete. (B) Girls signal their youth and trendiness by donning Harajuku-inspired fashion while hanging out in the Harajuku district of Tokyo.

> “We accept the love we think we deserve.”
>
> —STEPHEN CHBOSKY, *THE PERKS OF BEING A WALLFLOWER*

People engage in a number of self-verification strategies. They selectively attend to and recall information that is consistent with (and therefore verifies) their views of themselves. People with negative self-views, for example, spend more time studying negative rather than positive feedback about themselves, remember negative feedback better, and prefer to interact with others who are likely to provide negative rather than positive feedback (Swann & Read, 1981; Swann et al., 1992).

People also tend to enter relationships that promote consistent views of the self. These sorts of preferences make it more likely that their personal lives will confirm their self-views. In a study of intimate bonds, romantic partners who viewed each other in a congruent fashion—that is, whose perceptions of each other agreed with their self-views—reported more commitment to the relationship, even when one partner viewed the other in a negative light (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). Similarly, friendships with friends who “get you”—that is, see you as you see yourself—are likely to be smoother than those with friends who don’t verify your self-views.

Can both self-enhancement and self-verification motives be at play? Sure. Self-enhancement seems to be most relevant to our emotional responses to feedback about ourselves, whereas self-verification determines our more cognitive assessments of how valid that feedback is (Swann et al., 1987). To test this hypothesis, William Swann and colleagues gave participants with negative or positive self-beliefs negative or positive feedback. In terms of participants’ evaluations of the accuracy and competence of the feedback—that is, the quality of the information—self-verification prevailed. Those with negative self-beliefs found the negative feedback most accurate, whereas participants with positive beliefs rated the positive feedback as most accurate. All participants, however, felt good about the positive feedback and disliked the negative feedback. Our quest to verify our sense of ourselves, then, guides our assessment of the validity of self-relevant information, while our desire to think favorably about ourselves guides our emotional reactions to the same information (Kwang & Swann, 2010).

LOOKING BACK

Self-evaluative activities such as seeking out evaluative feedback about ourselves can be driven by different motives, such as self-enhancement and self-verification. Self-enhancement strategies include self-serving construals and self-affirmations. When self-verification is our priority, we seek out appraisals and relationship partners that confirm our preexisting self-views, and we display cues that increase the likelihood that others will see us as we see ourselves.

Glossary

self-enhancement

The desire to maintain, increase, or protect one’s positive self-views.

better-than-average effect

The finding that most people think they are above average on various personality trait and ability dimensions.

self-affirmation theory

The idea that people can maintain an overall sense of self-worth after being exposed to psychologically threatening information by affirming a valued aspect of themselves unrelated to the threat.

self-verification theory

The theory that people strive for others to view them as they view themselves; such verification of one’s views of the self helps people maintain a sense of coherence and predictability.

Self-Regulation: Motivating and Controlling Behavior

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Define self-regulation and explain how we employ it to achieve our goals.
- Explain how construals and automatic processes can influence our success in forgoing short-term temptations in the service of long-term goals.

Now that we have some understanding of the nature of the self and how people evaluate themselves, let’s turn to a major topic that links the self to behavior: self-regulation. Self-regulation refers to the processes by which people initiate, alter, and control their behavior in pursuit of a goal—whether the goal is to be liked on Instagram, to do well in school, or to get in better shape (Carver & Scheier, 1982; Higgins, 1999; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). In short, how do we manage ourselves so that we reach our goals? Given that successful goal pursuit often requires resisting temptations, self-regulation also involves the ability to prioritize long-term goals (saving money to attend college, to help your family out, or to buy a car someday) by forgoing short-term immediate rewards (buying the trendy new shoes in the store window). Let’s take a look at some of what social psychologists have discovered about self-regulation.

Self-Discrepancy Theory

One influential perspective on self-regulation is captured in a theory proposed by Tory Higgins (1987; Higgins et al., 1994). According to self-discrepancy theory, people hold beliefs about not only what they are *actually* like but also what they would *ideally* like to be and what they think they *ought* to be. Your actual self is the self you believe you are, your ideal self represents your hopes and wishes, and your ought self represents your duties and obligations.

According to self-discrepancy theory, ideal and ought beliefs serve as self-guides, motivating people to regulate their behavior in order to close the gap between their actual self and their ideal and ought standards. When people feel that they' re failing to live up to these standards—in other words, when they perceive a discrepancy between their actual self and either their ideal or ought self—there are predictable emotional consequences. Specifically, discrepancies between the actual and the ideal self produce dejection-related emotions, and discrepancies between the actual and the ought self give rise to agitation-related emotions. Here are two examples. When the judges disparage Sameer' s singing ability at an *American Idol* audition, the discrepancy between his actual self (a mediocre singer) and his ideal self (an R & B star) arouses dejection-related emotions, such as disappointment and shame. When Mina loses patience with her ailing grandmother (actual self), she may feel agitation-related emotions, such as guilt and anxiety, if her ought self includes being a patient and loving granddaughter.

Ideal and ought standards are associated with two fundamentally different approaches to goal pursuit. When people regulate their behavior with respect to ideal-self standards, they have a promotion focus, or a focus on attaining positive outcomes—such as becoming an R & B star (Higgins, 1996). By contrast, when people regulate their behavior with respect to ought-self standards, they have a prevention focus, a focus on avoiding negative outcomes—such as avoiding being a bad granddaughter. To take another example, imagine you have the chance to hang out with someone you’ve had a crush on for a while. A promotion focus would nudge you to focus on what you can do to get the person to reciprocate your feelings, whereas a prevention focus would have you thinking about what you can do to avoid looking like a fool.

Lots of evidence supports Higgins’s account of how ideal and ought selves can have different emotional, motivational, and behavioral consequences. When people are subtly prompted to think about how they might approximate their ideal self—for example, by reading personality trait terms that capture their ideal self—they generally exhibit elevated, cheerful emotions (Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997; Shah & Higgins, 2001) and heightened sensitivity to positive outcomes (Brendl, Higgins, & Lemm, 1995). But if they think they will never become their ideal self, they experience dejection-related emotions, such as depression and shame, and show reduced physiological arousal. In contrast, associations to a person’s ought self, and any deviation from it, activate agitated emotions (such as guilt or panic), elevated physiological arousal, avoidant behavior, and sensitivity to negative outcomes (Strauman & Higgins, 1987).

As you might expect, people from independent cultures are more likely to have a promotion focus. They are more interested in attaining personal goals and more likely to feel that their own efforts are sufficient to achieve them. People from East Asia and other interdependent cultures are more likely to exhibit a prevention focus. They are more concerned with the possible negative consequences of their actions and how they might affect their relations with others (Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000; Uskul, Sherman, & Fitzgibbon, 2009).

Shifts in Construals and Perspectives

When people pursue a goal with a promotion or a prevention focus, the goal itself is construed in one of two ways—obtaining a positive outcome or avoiding a negative one. The notion that one’s construal, or perspective, can shift is central to a number of theories of self-regulation that focus on how people control impulsive behaviors that undermine their goals. How do you resist the impulse to go out with your friends the night before a big exam? How about stopping yourself from having another scoop of ice cream when you’re trying to lose weight?

In the early 1970s, Walter Mischel and colleagues studied such questions in a well-known program of research involving, of all things, marshmallows (Mischel, Ebbesen, & Zeiss, 1972; Mischel, Shoda, & Rodriguez, 1989; for a more recent replication, see Michaelson & Munakata, 2020). In the classic marshmallow paradigm, preschool children were left in a room with a tempting marshmallow and given one of two options: They could have the one marshmallow (smaller reward) immediately simply by ringing a bell to summon the experimenter, or they could have two marshmallows (larger reward) if they waited for the experimenter to return 15 minutes later. So, go for the small reward now, or control yourself in order to get a bigger reward later? Sound familiar? Go out with your friends to have a fun night now, or resist so you can do better on your exam tomorrow?

It turns out that one way to exercise self-control is to shift how you construe the temptation—whether it be a marshmallow, ice cream, or a night out on the town. This strategy is what enabled some of the children in Mischel’s studies to resist the small, immediate reward in the service of the larger one later. Rather than perceiving the object before them as a marshmallow in all its sweet and mouth-watering delight, some of the children viewed the marshmallow in less appealing, or "cooler" terms, visualizing it as a decidedly non-mouth-watering cotton ball or cloud (Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999; Mischel & Ayduk, 2004). If you're trying to resist a temptation in the here and now (staying out all night partying), it helps to focus less on its alluring, "hotter" features (good music, laughter) and more on its unappealing facets (spending money, losing much-needed sleep).

SELF-CONTROL AND CONSTRUALS If the young girl construes the marshmallow in "cooler" terms, such as in terms of something that resembles a cloud or cotton ball, rather than "hotter" terms, such as in terms of its sweetness and chewiness, she'll have a better shot at resisting the marshmallow while she waits for the researcher to return so that she can get two marshmallows instead.

Construals of a situation can vary in other ways as well. Yaacov Trope and colleagues (Liberman, Trope, & Stephan, 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2010) have argued that events, goals, behaviors, and so forth can also vary in how high level or low level they are construed. High-level construals focus on abstract, global, and core features, whereas low-level construals emphasize salient, incidental, and concrete details. In other words, high-level construals involve seeing the “forest,” whereas low-level construals put the spotlight on the “trees.” It’s higher-level construals that tend to facilitate self-control. The idea is that higher-level construals, compared with lower-level ones, increase people’s appreciation of the consequences that their choices and behaviors have for their long-term goals. In other words, high-level construals emphasize people’s larger goals and values. For example, in a high-level construal (focusing on the forest), you might be thinking about your goal to save money and become financially independent, whereas in a low-level construal (focusing on the trees), you’re focused on the balance in your bank account (Fujita, 2011; Fujita et al., 2006).

Automatic Self-Control Strategies

Exercising self-control may sound like a conscious, deliberate endeavor. But there’s plenty of evidence that self-regulation efforts can operate automatically, without our even realizing it.

Researchers have distinguished between goal intentions, which simply specify a goal one wants to achieve (“I intend to be kinder to my little brother”), and implementation intentions, which specify how one will behave to achieve a goal under particular circumstances. Implementation intentions follow an “if-then” format—for example, “If my little brother acts annoying, then I’ll just ignore him.”

The “if” refers to some kind of cue, and the “then” refers to a behavior that will follow the cue to achieve the larger goal (in this case, being kinder to one’s little brother by ignoring him rather than yelling at him—or worse; Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006). There’s no question that to achieve a goal we must form an intention, but research shows that forming multiple, smaller implementation intentions related to the same goal increases our likelihood of goal attainment. And while the initial formation of an implementation intention reflects controlled processing, once these intentions are formed, the behaviors they specify can be automatically triggered by “if” cues in the environment.

In a typical study of this phenomenon, participants are randomly assigned either to form an implementation intention or not. Take, for example, a group of students who all share the goal of completing a paper. Those who are randomly assigned to the implementation intention condition are asked to form an implementation intention by indicating a specific point in time (“Saturday afternoon”) and specific place (“in my dorm room”) when they will engage in the goal-directed behavior (“work on my paper”). Students in the other group are not asked to form an implementation intention but simply have the general goal of completing the paper. When level of goal completion (completing the paper) is then assessed, students who formed an implementation intention show higher rates of goal completion. Such if-then implementation intentions help you reach your goals by virtue of the environmental cues specified in these intentions (“if it’s Saturday afternoon”), which automatically trigger the corresponding goal-directed behaviors (“then I will work on my paper”; Gollwitzer & Oettingen, 2016).

The effectiveness of implementation intentions has been documented across a wide range of goals and domains—doing well in school, being healthy, succeeding at work. Chadly Stern and Tessa West (2014) tested whether the formation of implementation intentions might help make social interactions that can be stressful at times, such as interactions involving people of different backgrounds, more pleasant. What they found was that forming implementation intentions for such interactions—intentions that specify an anxiety-reducing behavior (e.g., taking a deep breath) when feeling uncomfortable—increased the likelihood of a successful interaction. The lesson here is that the next time you anticipate an anxiety-provoking interaction (your next interview), you might form an if-then plan for this interaction that specifies what you will do (perhaps remind yourself of your amazing credentials) whenever your heart starts pounding.

Let’s consider one more example. Suppose you’re trying to eat a healthier diet (long-term goal), but you’re faced with a plate of freshly baked cookies (temptation). Surely the alluring properties of the cookies will put thoughts about eating healthily on the back burner, right? Ayelet Fishbach, Ronald Friedman, and Arie Kruglanski (2003) showed that quite the opposite can happen: The cookies may actually make you think more about your goal to eat healthily. The idea is that temptations (unhealthy foods) may become linked in memory to your goal (eating well), so that when temptations are brought to mind, so too are thoughts of healthy eating. And the connection between the two can occur automatically. What’s more, the Fishbach team found that bringing goals to mind first has the effect of *diminishing* thoughts about temptations. Thus, being faced with temptations reminds us of our goals, and thinking about our goals puts temptations out of mind. But before deciding that you can abandon all deliberate efforts to resist temptations, note that the results of this research apply mainly to people for whom the goal is very important and who have had substantial past success resisting goal-interfering temptations.

LOOKING BACK

Self-regulation refers to how people go about initiating, changing, and controlling their behavior in pursuit of goals. Goal-directed actions can be motivated by standards in the form of ideal and ought selves. Such actions can be either promotion focused or prevention focused. People tend to experience dejection-related emotions when they fall short of their ideal standards, and they experience agitation-related emotions when they fail to meet their ought standards. Self-regulation can be facilitated by “cooler” construals of short-term rewards and higher-level construals of our goals. People may have unintentional self-control strategies, such as reliance on implementation intentions and automatic behavioral tendencies to approach goals and avoid temptations.

Glossary

self-regulation

Processes by which people initiate and control their behavior in the pursuit of goals, including the ability to resist short-term rewards that thwart the attainment of long-term goals.

self-discrepancy theory

A theory that behavior is motivated by standards reflecting ideal and ought selves; falling short of these standards elicits specific emotions and may lead to efforts to get closer to them.

actual self

The self that people believe they are.

ideal self

The self that embodies people’s wishes and aspirations.

ought self

The self that is concerned with the duties, obligations, and external demands people feel they are compelled to honor.

promotion focus

Self-regulation of behavior with respect to ideal-self standards; a focus on attaining positive outcomes through approach-related behaviors.

prevention focus

Self-regulation of behavior with respect to ought-self standards; a focus on avoiding negative outcomes through avoidance-related behaviors.

implementation intention

An “if-then” plan to engage in a goal-directed behavior（“then”）whenever a particular cue（“if”）is encountered.

Self-Presentation

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe how self-presentation plays a role in our everyday social interactions and how much we adapt it to specific situations.
- Discuss some of the insights about self-preservation derived from social psychological research using social media platforms.

Alexi Santana entered Princeton University as a member of the class of 1993. His academic performance was impressive, he excelled in track, and he was admitted to one of the university’s most exclusive clubs (known at Princeton as “eating clubs,” where students gather to dine). He dazzled his dormmates with tales of being raised on a sheep farm in the wild canyons of southern Utah and with his unusual habits, such as preferring to sleep on the floor and routinely arising at dawn.

The only trouble was that Alexi Santana was actually James Hogue, a 34-year-old drifter and former track star from Kansas City. Hogue had been convicted of and served time for check forging and bicycle theft. He had gotten into Princeton thanks to a fraudulent application and had earned the admiration of his peers based on a completely fabricated identity. In the documentary film *Con Man*, director Jesse Moss showed that Hogue had a pattern of assuming false identities.

PALO ALTO
UTAH STATE PRISON
DRAPER, UTAH
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0·5·2·5

SELF-PRESENTATION James Hogue attended Princeton University on an academic scholarship under the assumed name of Alexi Santana. He constructed a false identity for himself as a self-educated 18-year-old from Utah. Hogue was arrested for forgery, wrongful impersonation, and falsifying records at Princeton.

Hogue's story (or is it Santana's?) illustrates a basic truth: Our social self is often a dramatic performance in which we try to project a public self consistent with our hopes and aspirations. This public self is one that we actively create in our social interactions and is shaped by the perceptions of other people and the perceptions we want others to have of us (Baumeister, 1982; Mead, 1934; Schlenker, 1980; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). The public self is concerned with self-presentation—presenting the person we would like others to believe we are. Another term for this concept is *impression management*, which refers to how we attempt to control the particular impressions other people form about us.

Sociologist Erving Goffman inspired the study of self-presentation with his keen observations about how we stake out our identity in the public realm (Goffman, 1959, 1967). Goffman relied on naturalistic observations of how people behave in public settings. He observed patients in mental institutions and noted how they seemed to ignore many rules of self-presentation, such as making unflattering comments about others and failing to observe common social courtesies. Goffman wrote an entire chapter on what he called response cries, like “Oops!,” that we resort to when we feel deeply embarrassed after committing social gaffes. These linguistic acts help reestablish social order when we have violated the rules of self-presentation and show how committed we are to preserving the self we want others to accept.

Such observations led Goffman to form a dramaturgic perspective on the social self. Social interaction can be thought of as a drama of self-presentation in which we attempt to create and maintain an impression of ourselves in the minds of others (Baumeister, 1982; J. D. Brown, 1998; Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker & Leary, 1982). Critical to this drama, in Goffman’s terms, is face, the public image of ourselves that we want others to have. For instance, one person may want to be seen as a gifted, temperamental musician; another might want to give the impression of being an object of romantic interest to many people. Social interactions are the stage on which we play out these kinds of claims, regardless of how true they may be. Much like a play, the social drama of self-presentation is highly collaborative. We depend on others to honor our desired social identities, and others likewise depend on us to honor their face claims.

(A)

(B)

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC FACES People may present themselves differently in private versus public. (A) Here Rihanna is shown in her more private life, out for a coffee run with no carefully constructed public face, but (B) she does present a public face on the red carpet at the Metropolitan Museum of Art Gala in 2014.

Goffman’ s insights have shaped the study of the social self in several ways. For example, the concept of self-monitoring derives in part from Goffman’ s work (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000; Snyder, 1974, 1979). Self-monitoring refers to the tendency to monitor one’ s behavior to fit the demands of the current situation. High self-monitors carefully scrutinize situations and, like actors, shift their self-presentation and behavior according to the people present and situation at hand. In contrast, low self-monitors are more likely to behave according to their own traits and preferences, regardless of social context. This suggests admirable candor and honesty. However, one study showed that patients in a psychiatric hospital scored low on a self-monitoring scale, suggesting that effective social functioning requires participation in some degree of strategic self-presentation (Snyder, 1974).

Self-Handicapping

One of the complexities of strategic self-presentation is that people often don’ t live up to the public self they’ re trying to portray. For example, your claim about being the next great American novelist will eventually be put to the test when you submit your prose for publication; your claim about being a great triathlete will eventually face the truth of the stopwatch. The obvious drawback of the public self is that we might not live up to it, and we risk embarrassing ourselves when that happens. To protect the self in these circumstances, we engage in various self-protective behaviors.

Self-handicapping is the tendency to engage in self-defeating behavior to protect the self in public and to prevent others from making unwanted inferences based on poor performance (Arkin & Baumgardner, 1985; Deppe & Harackiewicz, 1996; Hendrix & Hirt, 2009; Hirt, McCrea, & Kimble, 2000; Jones & Berglas, 1978). Think of how often people engage in self-destructive behaviors when their public selves are on the line. Students sometimes irrationally put too little effort into studying for an exam. A person may act too casually at a job interview or say shockingly inappropriate things on a first date. Why do we engage in such self-defeating behaviors? In Goffman’s view, these actions provide an explanation for possible failure, thereby protecting the desired public self if failure does occur. If you don’t do as well as expected on an exam, there’s no threat to your claim about your academic talents if you have the excuse of not having prepared for the exam in the first place. Of course, some “self-handicap” claims are bogus. Classrooms are filled with students who act as though they haven’t studied hard when in fact they did. The phenomenon is so common that students at Dartmouth College have given those who do it a name: “sneaky bookers.”

SELF-MONITORING This couple is probably engaging in a considerable degree of self-monitoring, altering their behavior to fit the specific demands of first-date situations like this one.

In one of the first experiments testing self-handicapping, male participants were led to believe that they were going to either succeed or have difficulty on a test they were scheduled to take (Berglas & Jones, 1978). Participants were given the chance to ingest one of two drugs: The first would enhance their test performance, and the second would impair it. Participants who felt they were likely to fail the test preferred the performance-inhibiting drug, even though it was likely to diminish their chances of success. Apparently, people would sometimes rather fail and have a ready excuse for it than try for success and have no excuse for failure.

BOX 3.3

FOCUS ON HEALTH

Dying to Present a Favorable Self

You might assume that self-presentation is always a good thing. Erving Goffman himself wrote about how presenting yourself strategically and honoring other people’s public claims are essential ingredients of harmonious interactions and communities. But self-presentational concerns can sometimes be dangerous (Leary, Tchividjian, & Kraxberger, 1994). Many practices that promote health are awkward or embarrassing and pose problems for our public identity. As a consequence, we avoid them. We sacrifice physical health to maintain a public identity defined by composure and aplomb. In one study, for example, between 30 and 65 percent of respondents reported embarrassment when buying condoms (Hanna, 1989). Embarrassment could deter sexually active teenagers from buying and using condoms, thus increasing their risk of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies. Similarly, the fear of embarrassment at times prevents obese individuals from pursuing physical exercise programs or taking needed medications (Bain, Wilson, & Chaikind, 1989).

In other instances, we engage in risky behavior to enhance our public image and identity. Concerns about others’ impressions of us and concerns about our physical appearance are good predictors of excessive sunbathing (Leary & Jones, 1993) and the use of artificial UV tanning devices (Dennis, Lowe, &

Snetselaar, 2009), both of which put people at higher risk of various forms of skin cancer. Moreover, adolescents typically cite social approval as one of the most important reasons for starting to drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes (Farber, Khavari, & Douglass, 1980), and use e-cigarettes (vapes; Perikleous et al., 2018). And the same need for an enhanced public image motivates many cosmetic surgeries, which carry with them a variety of health risks.

Presenting the Self Online

As of late 2021, Facebook reported over 2.80 billion active monthly users, 1.89 billion of whom were active daily. When you add to the tally everyone else participating in other forms of social media, that’s a whole lot of social life happening online. Social media may be used for various purposes, such as staying connected with loved ones, but one major use is managing and presenting one’s self-image to others (Manzi et al., 2018; Schlosser, 2020). After all, given that most of the information on social networking sites like Facebook is provided by users themselves, there is ample opportunity for people to manage others’ impressions of them. So, what does self-presentation in the online social world look like? Do people tend to present themselves authentically online, posting accurate information about who they are, what they’ve accomplished, their beliefs, their likes and dislikes? Or do people take advantage of the opportunity that social networking sites offer to convey especially positive self-images?

Self-presentation researchers have begun to tackle these questions. In one study, researchers had observers rate the personality traits (including extraversion, neuroticism, and openness) of 236 American and German users of online social networking sites—Facebook in the United States and similar sites called StudiVZ and SchuelerVZ in Germany—based on the information provided on their profiles (Back et al., 2010). Observers’ ratings were compared with an accuracy criterion made up of an average of users’ own ratings of their personality and the ratings of four well-acquainted friends. Users were also asked to provide ratings reflecting who they would ideally like to be. Would you expect observer ratings to correlate more closely with the users’ and friends’ ratings, thus suggesting that people present themselves relatively accurately online, or with users’ ideal-self ratings, suggesting instead that people try to present themselves in an ideal light online? You may be surprised to learn that the findings supported the former view: Online, people tend to present their offline selves fairly accurately, a conclusion bolstered by other studies as well (Stopfer et al., 2014; Waggoner, Smith, & Collins, 2009).

Although most of the research in this area has thus far focused on Facebook, similar conclusions have been drawn based on other social media platforms, such as Twitter. In one study, researchers found that self-expression via tweets is fairly accurate—that is, there is a decent degree of association between raters’ judgments of tweeters based on the content of their tweets and tweeters’ own self-ratings on dimensions such as self-esteem (Orehek & Human, 2017). Now, research in this area is still in its infancy, and findings like these aren’t without caveats. For example, accurate online self-presentations are more likely for certain trait dimensions than for others (e.g., for openness more than for neuroticism; Darbyshire et al., 2016). But at present, it seems clear that people are not engaging in rampant impression management on social media.

So why would people present themselves accurately online when it seems so easy, not to mention tempting, to paint a positive image of the self online? Recall that although self-enhancement motives are robust (particularly among members of Western cultures), other self-evaluative motives may prevail at times. In particular, online self-presentations may be driven as much or more by self-verification motives, the desire to be known by others as we truly are in our own eyes (Swann, 1990), and crafting accurate online profiles of the self would serve that need. A less flattering explanation is that overly favorable online presentations of the self often need to withstand offline scrutiny. You can probably relate to having offline interactions with people who know you through social media, making it difficult (or at least awkward) to post blatantly inaccurate statements about yourself online. But research suggests that while we may present our personality and other attributes (such as our occupation) fairly accurately online, we are less likely to do so when it comes to our physical attributes, such as our height, weight, and age (that is, we may post outdated or deceiving photos; Toma & Hancock, 2010). This may be because of the vital role that physical appearance plays in attraction (see Chapter 9).

LOOKING BACK

Self-presentation involves people’s efforts to get others to form particular impressions of them. These strategies are more characteristic of high self-monitors: people who change their behavior based on the situation in which they find themselves. Low self-monitors attend more to their own preferences and dispositions with little regard for the situation or what others think. People may engage in self-defeating behaviors, or self-handicapping, to have an excuse available should they fail or perform poorly. Self-presentation is also relevant in online social networking, where it appears that people are generally inclined to provide accurate information about themselves, such as their personality traits, but may engage in more impression management about other aspects of themselves, such as their physical features.

Glossary

self-presentation

Presenting the person we would like others to believe we are.

face

The public image of ourself that we want others to believe.

self-monitoring

The tendency to monitor one’s behavior to fit the current situation.

self-handicapping

The tendency to engage in self-defeating behavior in order to have an excuse ready should one perform poorly or fail.

Chapter Review

SUMMARY

The Nature of the Social Self

- The self is fundamentally social, and it shifts according to changes in the social situation.
- *Self-schemas* are organizing structures that represent a person’ s beliefs and feelings about the self, both in general and in specific situations, and that shape construal of social information.

Origins of the Sense of Self

- Socialization by family members and other important people is a foundation of the social self. *Reflected self-appraisals* are beliefs about what others think of one’ s self.
- The social self is shaped by the current situation in many ways, and different selves are evoked in different situations; the working self-concept embodies the particular self-aspects that are evoked in a given situation.
- The social self is profoundly shaped by whether people are raised and live in independent or interdependent cultures.
- Women generally emphasize their relationships and define themselves in an interdependent way; men generally emphasize their uniqueness and construe themselves in an independent way.
- People rely on *social comparisons* to learn about their own abilities, attitudes, and personal traits.

- Social identities refer to aspects of the self that are associated with a person’s group memberships; when a given social identity is salient, people tend to self-stereotype, viewing themselves in ways reflecting attributes that are stereotypically associated with the group.

Self-Esteem

- Trait self-esteem is a stable part of one’s identity, whereas state self-esteem changes according to different contextual factors.
- Self-esteem is defined by particular domains of importance, or *contingencies of self-worth*, and by being accepted by others.
- The *sociometer hypothesis* posits that self-esteem is a gauge of one’s social standing, more so a measure of one’s evaluation of the self.
- Self-esteem is more important, and tends to be higher, in Western cultures than in East Asian cultures.

Motives Driving Self-Evaluation

- Motives for self-evaluation include the desires for *self-enhancement* and *self-verification*.
- People employ many different strategies to think well of themselves, such as self-serving definitions of what it means to be talented.
- Having others verify our views of who we are confers stability in our set of self-beliefs and gives us a sense of coherence and predictability.

Self-Regulation: Motivating and Controlling Behavior

- *Self-discrepancy theory* investigates how people compare their *actual self* to both their *ideal self* and their *ought self* and the emotional consequences of such comparisons.
- When people regulate their behavior with respect to ideal-self standards, they have a *promotion focus* on attaining positive outcomes. When people regulate their behavior with respect to ought-self standards, they have a *prevention focus* on avoiding negative outcomes.
- Self-control can be facilitated by construals that focus on "cooler" features of a tempting stimulus and by higher-level, abstract construals of a situation.
- Self-control strategies can be implemented automatically, such as when behavior unfolds automatically as specified in an *implementation intention* or when long-term goals automatically spring to mind when people face temptations that can thwart these goals.

Self-Presentation

- *Self-presentation* is related to the public self; people present themselves the way they want others to see them. *Face* refers to the image people want others to have of them. *Self-monitoring* ensures that a person's behavior fits the demands of the social context.
- People protect their public self through *self-handicapping*, behavior that can excuse a poor performance or a failure.
- Self-presentation happens online, just as it does in face-to-face interactions. Different motives can guide online self-presentation, including the desire for others to see the self accurately.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. According to research on the accuracy of self-knowledge, for what qualities are we the best judges of ourselves? For what qualities are others superior judges of us? How does motivation contribute to this asymmetry?
2. How might an undergraduate woman’ s working self-concept regarding her gender shift during a day on campus as she attends her advanced math class (in which she is the only woman), has a low-key lunch with a friend, and attends her gender studies class? Will her frequently shifting self-concept undermine her sense of having a coherent self?
3. How do people’ s daily experiences in their contingent versus noncontingent domains affect their state self-esteem? Over time, how might these experiences translate to trait self-esteem?
4. Do people from Eastern cultures generally feel worse about themselves than people from Western cultures do? How do researchers interpret self-reported self-esteem differences between cultures?
5. Should people be more likely to display the better-than-average effect for their own intelligence before or after learning how intelligence is measured in scientific research? How do construals contribute to this process?
6. If you’ re fairly sure you are scatterbrained, but a friend tells you that you’ re organized and focused, what will your cognitive reaction likely be? What will your emotional reaction likely be? Which motive—self-enhancement or self-verification—drives which set of reactions?
7. Suppose two friends both have an actual self that is relatively happy and a potential self that is extremely happy (happier than their actual self). If this discrepancy in happiness leads one friend to experience agitation and the other friend to experience dejection, what does this tell you? What theory would this evidence support?

The answer guidelines for the Think About It questions can be found at the back of the book . . .

ONLINE STUDY MATERIALS

Want to earn a better grade on your test?

Go to INQUIZITIVE to learn and review this chapter’s content, with personalized feedback along the way.

CHAPTER
4

Social Cognition: Thinking About People and Situations

What makes us sometimes trust people we shouldn’t?

What determines whether we think of foreign travel as “expanding our horizons” versus “walking around in another country”?

ELECTIONS
ELECTIONS

How might the labels used to describe pending voting legislation affect public support for it?

OUTLINE

- Snap Judgments: Inferring Personality From Physical Appearance
- Inferring the Causes of Behavior
- How Information Is Presented
- How We Seek Information
- Top-Down Processing: Using Schemas to Understand New Information
- Reason, Intuition, and Heuristics

EARLY IN THE MORNING ON JUNE 28, 1993, New York State troopers on Long Island’s Southern State Parkway noticed a Mazda pickup truck with no license plates. When they motioned for the driver to pull over, he sped off, leading them on a 25-minute chase that ended when the Mazda slammed into a utility pole. After arresting the driver, the officers noticed a foul odor emanating from under a tarp in the back of the truck. When the tarp was removed, the officers discovered the badly decomposed body of a 22-year-old woman. Subsequent investigation implicated the driver, Joel Rifkin, in the murders of 16 other women, making him the most prolific serial killer in New York State history.

Those who knew Rifkin expressed shock at the news. One neighbor told reporters, “When I would come home at 1 or 2 in the morning, if I saw the garage light on, I’d feel safe because I knew Joel was around.” A second neighbor said he was “simply a gentle young man.” Classmates asserted he was “not the kind of guy who would do something like this.”

As this story makes clear, social judgments can have serious consequences. Mistaking a serial killer for someone “gentle” and “safe” can be a lethal error. More generally, effective action requires sound judgment about other people and the world around us. “How will my professor react if I ask for more time?” “Are they developing nuclear weapons?” “Can I trust my boyfriend?”

This chapter discusses social cognition as well as sources of error in judgments about the social world. The field of social cognition is concerned with how people think about the social world and arrive at judgments that help them interpret the past, understand the present, and predict the future. One of the earliest and most fundamental principles of social psychology is the construal principle introduced in Chapter 1: If we want to know how a person will react in a given situation, we must understand how the person interprets that situation.

> “Many complain about their memory; few about their judgment.”
>
> —FRANÇOIS DE LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

> “All human knowledge is uncertain, inexact, and partial.”
>
> —BERTRAND RUSSELL

The story of Joel Rifkin does more than testify to the importance of the social judgments we make in everyday life. It also highlights the fact that our judgments are not always flawless. We trust some people we shouldn’t. We make some investments that turn out to be unwise. Errors in judgment are informative to psychologists because they provide particularly helpful clues about how people think about others and make inferences about them. The strategy of scrutinizing mistakes has a long tradition in psychology. Perceptual psychologists study illusions because they help reveal general principles of perception. Psycholinguists study speech errors to learn about speech production. Mistakes can reveal a great deal about how a system works by showing its limitations. Thus, researchers interested in social cognition have often explored the limitations of everyday judgment. ■

Snap Judgments: Inferring Personality From Physical Appearance

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify the aspects of a person’s face that most influence snap judgments.
- Assess the accuracy of snap judgments.

When you engage in people watching in a park, an airport, or a café, you don’t just watch. You judge. You form detailed impressions of complete strangers based on the briefest glances. We all do. In a telling empirical demonstration of how quickly we can make such judgments about others, Janine Willis and Alex Todorov (2006) showed participants a large number of faces and had them rate how trustworthy, competent, likable, aggressive, or attractive each person seemed. Some participants were given as much time as they wanted to make each rating, and their trait judgments were used as the “gold standard” of comparison—the most telling impressions an individual could form based solely on photographs. Other participants were also asked to rate the photos, but after seeing each face for only a second, half a second, or a tenth of a second. As it turned out, hurried trait judgments were remarkably similar to the more reflective assessments. A great deal of what we conclude about people based on their faces is determined almost instantaneously.

Important Dimensions of Snap Judgments

What is it that people think they see in brief glances at another person’s face? To find out, Todorov and his colleagues had participants rate a large number of photographs of different faces on the personality dimensions that people tend to mention spontaneously when describing faces (Todorov et al., 2008). When they looked at how all these judgments correlated with one another, they found that two dimensions stand out. One is a positive-negative dimension, involving such assessments as whether someone looks trustworthy or untrustworthy, aggressive or not aggressive. The other dimension focuses on power, involving such assessments as whether someone seems confident or bashful, dominant or submissive. It appears, then, that people are predisposed to make quite important snap judgments about others: whether they should be approached or avoided (dimension 1), and whether they’re likely to be top dog or underdog (dimension 2). Todorov used computer models to generate faces representing various combinations of these two dimensions, including faces that are more extreme on each trait dimension than would likely be encountered in real life (**Figure 4.1**). In these faces, you can see the hypermasculine features that make someone look dominant, such as a very pronounced jaw, and the features that make someone look trustworthy, such as the shape of the eyebrows and eye sockets, and whether the person is smiling or frowning.

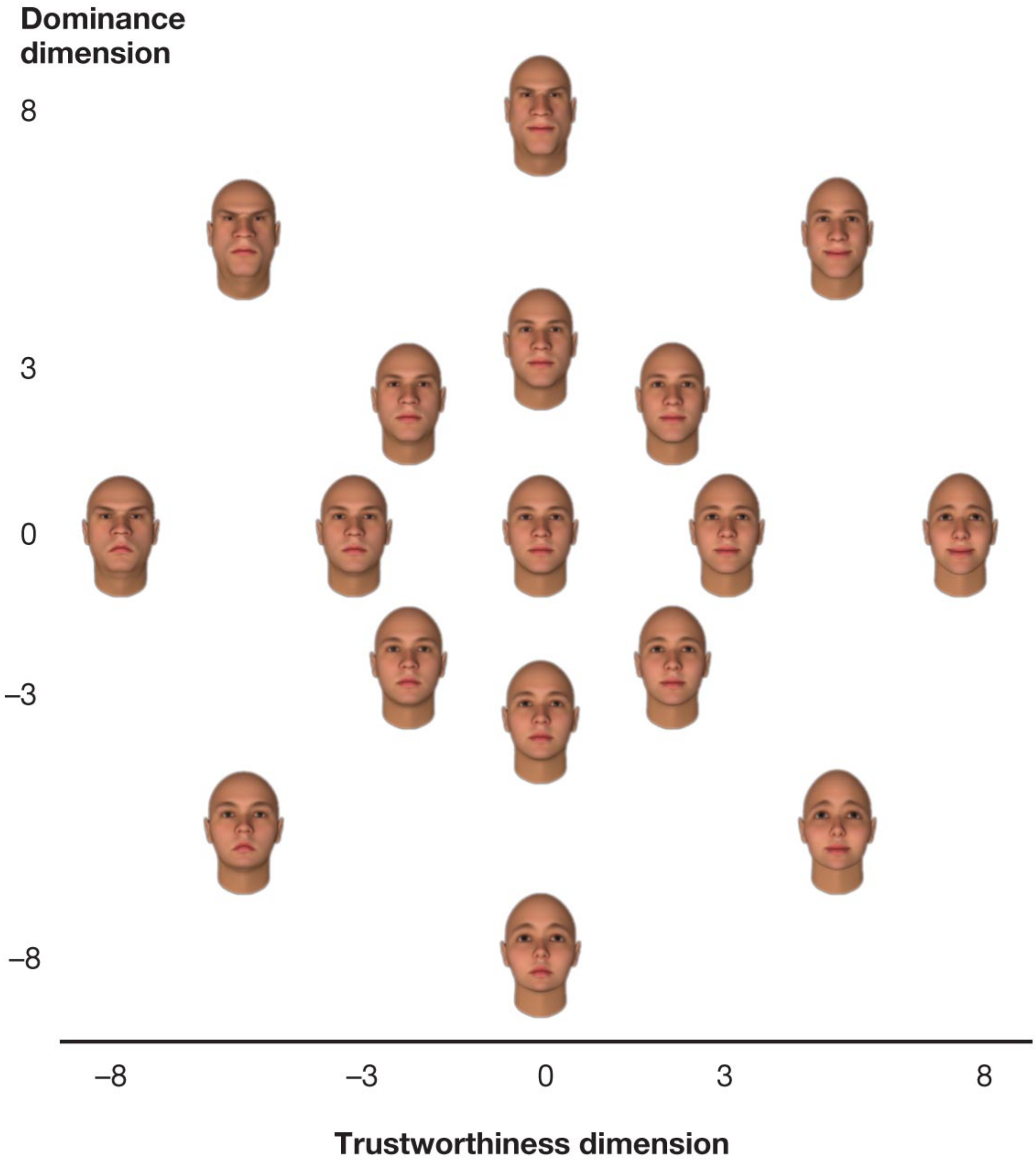
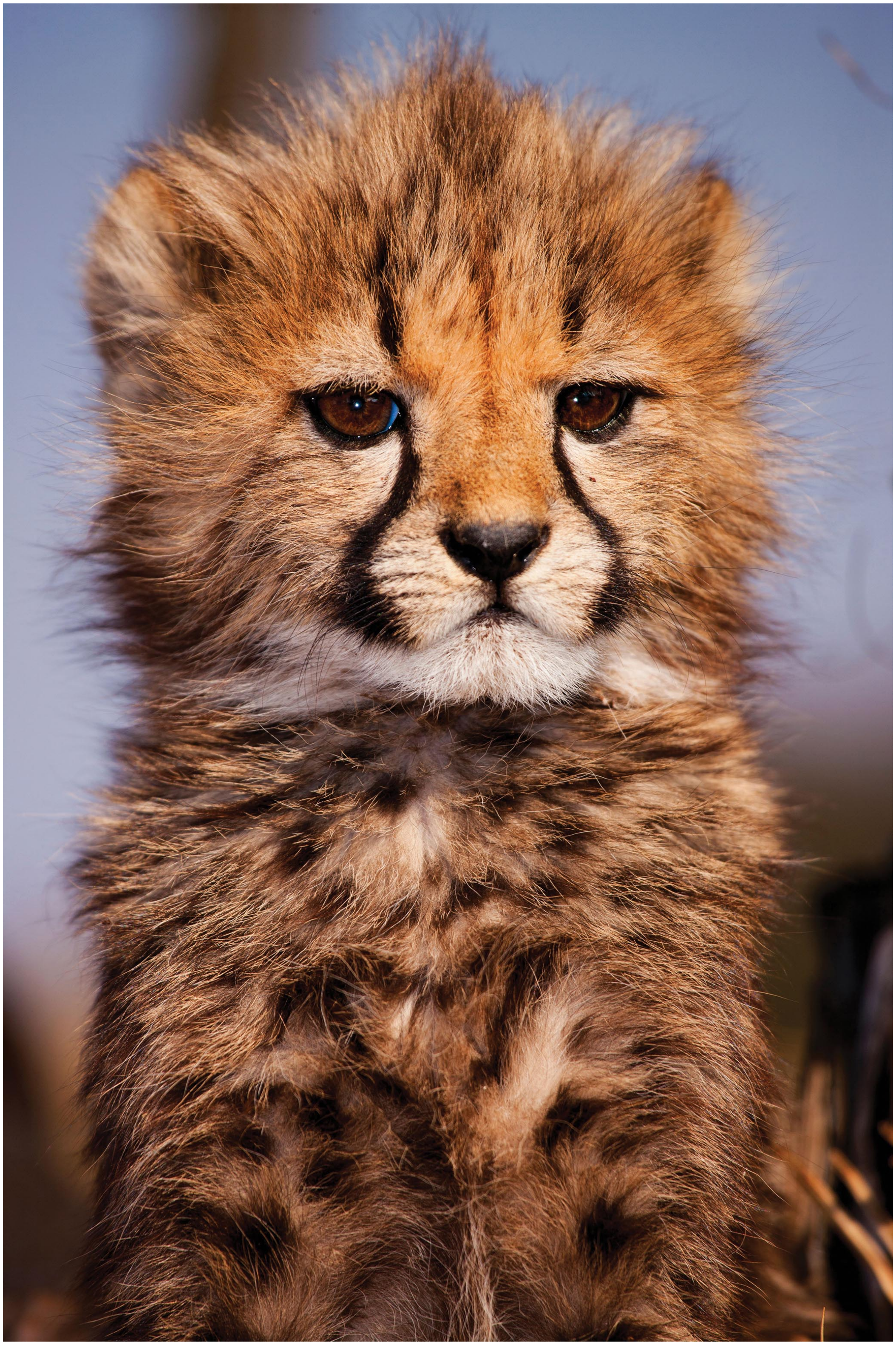


FIGURE 4.1 **JUDGING FACES** These computer-generated faces show variations on the two independent dimensions of trustworthiness (*x*-axis) and dominance (*y*-axis), which play an important role in snap judgments. Source: Adapted from Todorov et al., 2008.

If you look at the faces that are seen as trustworthy and not dominant, you'll notice that they tend to look like baby faces. Indeed, extensive research by Leslie Zebrowitz and her colleagues has shown that adults with such baby-faced features as large round eyes, a large forehead, high eyebrows, and a rounded, relatively small chin are assumed to possess many of the characteristics associated with the very young (Berry & Zebrowitz-McArthur, 1986; Zebrowitz & Montepare, 2005). They are judged to be relatively weak, naive, and submissive, whereas adults with small eyes, a small forehead, and an angular, prominent chin tend to be judged as strong, competent, and dominant.

It makes sense that we consider adults with baby faces to be relatively harmless and helpless. The renowned ethologist Konrad Lorenz (1950/1971) speculated that the cuteness of the young in many mammalian species triggers a hardwired, automatic reaction in adults of the species that helps ensure adequate care for the young and helpless. The automatic nature of our response to infantile features makes it more likely that we would overgeneralize and come to see even adults with such features as trustworthy and friendly. These assessments have dramatic consequences: Baby-faced individuals receive more favorable treatment as defendants in court (Zebrowitz & McDonald, 1991), but they have a harder time being seen as appropriate candidates for “adult” jobs, such as those in banking (Zebrowitz, Tenenbaum, & Goldstein, 1991).



INFANTILE FEATURES IN YOUNG MAMMALS Do you find these baby animals cute? Do you feel warmth and compassion toward

> them? You should. Psychologists and ethologists argue that the features associated with the very young in virtually all mammalian species trigger emotions that encourage caregiving and hence survival.

The Accuracy of Snap Judgments

How accurate are the snap judgments we make about people based on their appearance or brief samples of their behavior? Are people with baby faces, for example, really more likely to be weak or submissive? Are the facial features people associate with different personality traits valid cues to those traits? Are brief glimpses of people's behavior—psychologists call them "thin slices" of behavior—reliable guides to what they're really like?

Note that sometimes it's as important to know what other people think someone is like as it is to know that person's true characteristics. In those cases, the pertinent question boils down to how well snap judgments predict more considered consensus opinion. The evidence indicates that they predict rather well. For example, in one study, participants were shown, for 1 second, pictures of the Republican and Democratic candidates in U.S. congressional elections and asked to indicate which candidates looked more competent. Those judged to be more competent by most of the participants won 69 percent of the races (Todorov et al., 2005). Note that these judgments of competence might not be accurate: The person judged to be more competent might not actually be more competent. However, what matters in predicting the outcome of elections is not what is really true but what the electorate believes to be true.

In another line of research, participants were shown thin slices of professors' performance in the classroom (three silent, 10-second video clips) and asked to rate the professors on a variety of dimensions, such as how anxious, competent, active, and warm they seemed. These relatively quick assessments correlated significantly with students’ evaluations of the professors at the end of the semester (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1993). In other words, the quick reactions did a decent job of predicting later judgments that were based on exposure to much larger samples of behavior. But we still don’t know that these reactions accurately reflect what the professors are really like—how educational experts might judge their competence, for example, or how well their students do on exams compared with students in other professors’ classes.

But in still another study, participants were able to determine the sexual orientation of gay, lesbian, and straight individuals at beyond chance levels on the basis of 10-second clips of them sitting in a chair (Ambady, Hallahan, & Conner, 1999).

The available evidence thus indicates that there is often some veracity even to impressions based on extremely brief exposure to other people’s behavior. Nevertheless, it’s probably unwise to put too much confidence in our snap judgments because they generally contain only a kernel of truth (Pound, Penton-Voak, & Brown, 2007; Zebrowitz, Voinescu, & Collins, 1996). But they do provide a kernel.

LOOKING BACK

We often make snap judgments about other people based only on their physical appearance and small samples of their behavior. Research indicates that when people make snap judgments, they tend to agree with one another to a remarkable degree. Still, it’s important to be more than a bit cautious about snap judgments—our own or other people’s—because even though people may agree that, for example, Jada is likely to succeed at whatever she tries or Professor Kumar is an effective teacher, they may not be right. Consensus is not the same thing as accuracy.

Inferring the Causes of Behavior

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Summarize the rules people follow to infer the causes of behavior and some of the most common biases in people's causal analysis.
- Learn how counterfactual thoughts influence our causal assessments and the intensity of our emotional reactions.
- Discuss how people of different cultures differ in their causal inferences.

Of course, we don't size up other people based solely on what they look like or on very thin slices of their behavior. We examine and assess their actions—often actions that unfold over a longer period of time. And in line with the construal principle, our judgments are based on the *meaning* we assign to the behavior we witness, whether someone else's or our own.

When you ask someone out on a date but are rebuffed ("Sorry, but I already have plans"), you don't simply take the response at face value. You wonder whether the person actually has something else going on or is giving you the brush-off. Similarly, when you get an exam back, you're not simply delighted or dejected about the grade you received. You make an attribution. If the grade is a good one, you might decide that this is further evidence of how smart you are, or you might attribute the grade to easy grading. If the grade is bad, you might decide that you're not good at this subject or that the test was unfair.

Concluding that someone who won’t go out with you must be very busy leads to an entirely different set of emotional reactions than concluding that the person finds you unappealing. And attributing a bad grade on an exam to a lack of ability leads to unhappiness and withdrawal, whereas attributing failure to a lack of effort often leads to more vigorous attempts to study harder and more effectively in the future.

The Processes of Causal Attribution

Does that car salesman really believe the turbo engine is essential to performance, or is he just saying that to get a bigger commission? Is my officemate really that selfish, or is she just under a lot of pressure?

As these questions suggest, when we’re trying to figure out the causes of someone’s behavior, a particularly important question is whether the behavior is the product of something within the person (that is, an internal, or dispositional, cause) or a reflection of something about the context or circumstances surrounding the behavior (an external, or situational, cause). Ever since Kurt Lewin pointed out that behavior is always a function of both the person and the situation (see Chapter 1), theories of attribution have focused on how people assess the relative contributions of these two types of causes (Heider, 1958; Hilton & Slugoski, 1986; Hilton, Smith, & Kim, 1995; E. E. Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967; Medcoff, 1990).

Frequently, the distinction between internal and external causes is straightforward. You might win the pot in your weekly poker game because you’re a better player than everyone else (internal cause) or because you were lucky and got the best cards (external cause). In other contexts, the distinction isn’t as clear. We might say that someone became a rock-and-roll guitarist because of a deep love for the instrument (internal cause) or because of the desire for fame and fortune (external cause). But aren’t love for the instrument and desire for fame both inner states? Why is the desire for fame and fortune considered an external cause? The answer is that loving to play the guitar is not something nearly everyone shares, so it tells us something informative about the person and is therefore personal, or internal. Many people, however, seem to find the prospect of fame attractive. (Why else would there be so many reality TV shows?) And even more people find the prospect of wealth attractive. Doing something to achieve fame and fortune, then, tells us little about the person pursuing either. So, in this case, it makes sense to refer to this cause as something impersonal, or external. Determining whether actions are the product of internal or external causes thus requires assessments of what most people are like and what most people are likely to do.

Attribution and Covariation

When scientists attempt to nail down the cause of some phenomenon, they try to isolate the one cause that seems to make a difference in producing the effect. In other words, they try to identify the cause that is always present when the effect or phenomenon occurs and is always absent when the phenomenon does not occur. For example, to determine whether ulcers are caused by a bacterium, a medical researcher might determine whether people who are given the bacterium develop ulcers and whether people who have ulcers improve after taking an antibiotic that fights the bacterium.

> “The logic of science is also that of business and life.”
>
> —JOHN STUART MILL

> “The whole of science is nothing more than a refinement of everyday thinking.”
>
> —ALBERT EINSTEIN

To a considerable degree, this is also how people assess causality in their everyday lives (P. W. Cheng & Novick, 1990; Fiedler, Walther, & Nickel, 1999; Försterling, 1989; Hewstone & Jaspars, 1987; Kelley, 1973; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; White, 2002). When your friend states that she likes her statistics class, you automatically try to figure out why: Is she a math person? Is the class taught by a great professor? What does your friend say about her other classes? What do other students in her statistics class say about it?

In assessing causality, people use what attribution theorists have dubbed the covariation principle (Kelley, 1973). We try to determine what causes—internal or external, characteristic of the person in question or applicable to nearly everyone—“covary” with what we’re trying to explain. One type of covariation information, consensus, refers to what most people would do in a given situation. Does everyone behave the same way in that situation, or do few other people behave that way? Is your friend one of a precious few who likes her statistics class, or do most students like the class? All else being equal, the more an individual’s reaction is shared by others (when consensus is high), the less it says about that individual and the more it says about the situation.

COVARIATION AND ATTRIBUTION If your roommate laughs at Phoebe Robinson but doesn't laugh at many other comedians on TV (high distinctiveness), and if most people you know laugh at Phoebe Robinson (high consensus), you're going to think your roommate laughs at her because of the situation—namely, because it's a Phoebe Robinson performance. If your roommate laughs at pretty much every comic on the tube (low distinctiveness), and you know lots of people who don't find Phoebe Robinson to be funny (low consensus), you're going to think that your roommate laughs at any comedian because he's a pushover for comedians; in other words, he has a disposition to find things funny.

Another type of covariation information, distinctiveness, refers to what an individual does in different situations. Is a particular behavior unique to a specific situation, or does the person react the same way in many situations? Does your friend seem to like all math classes or even all classes in general, or does she just like her statistics class? The more someone's reaction is confined to a particular situation (when distinctiveness is high), the less it says about that individual and the more it says about the specific situation.

To reiterate, a *situational attribution* is called for when consensus and distinctiveness are both high. When everyone else in your friend’s statistics class likes it too, and when your friend likes few other math classes, there must be something special about that class. In contrast, a *dispositional attribution* is called for when consensus and distinctiveness are both low. When few other students like the statistics class, and when your friend claims to like all math courses, her fondness for the course must reflect something about her (Försterling, 1989; Hewstone & Jaspars, 1983; Hilton et al., 1995; L. A. McArthur, 1972; White, 2002).

Discounting and Counterfactual Thinking

The judgments people make aren’t always based on what has actually happened; sometimes they are based on what people *imagine* would happen under different situations or if a different individual were involved. For example, in considering the high rates of obedience in Milgram’s experiment (see Chapters 1 and 8), you might try to imagine what you would do if you were a participant. You might find it difficult to imagine administering so much electric shock to the victim (the “learner”). In other words, you might believe that a change in the participant—in particular, if *you* were the participant—would lead to a change in the outcome. Hence, you would conclude that it must have been the person (or rather the people who delivered so much shock), not the situation, that was responsible for the behavior.

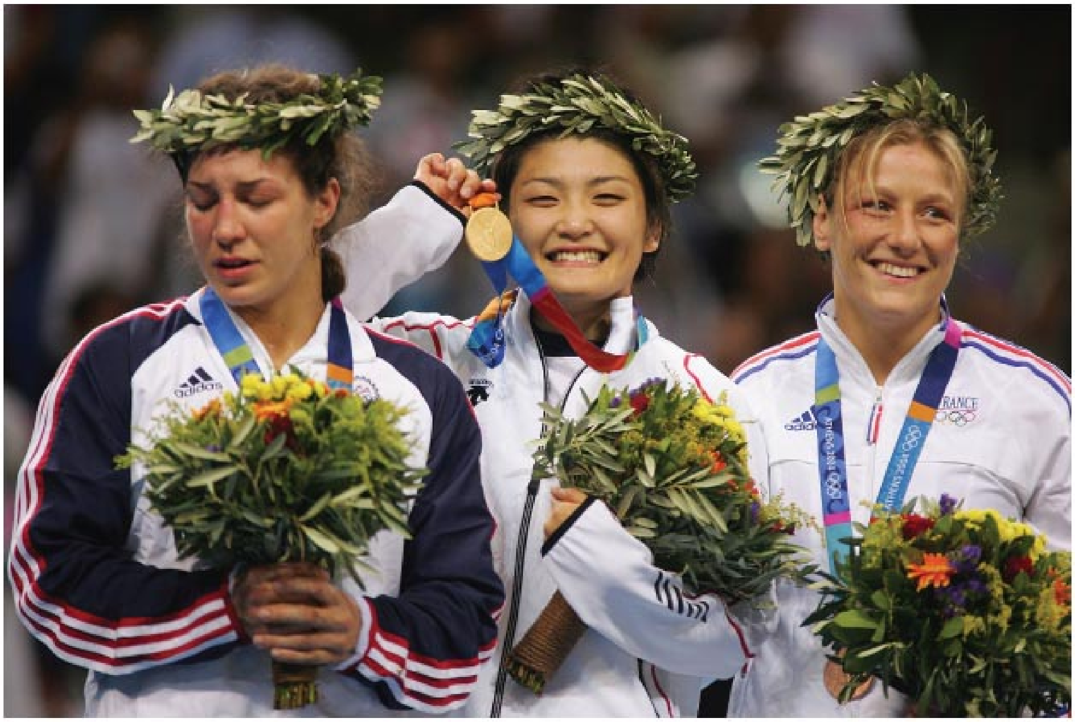
Sometimes the information available to us suggests that there could be multiple causes for a given behavior. A young man interviews for a job and seems quite personable. Did he seem personable because that’s the way he really is or because he was just putting on a good face for the interview?

In circumstances like these, the discounting principle says that our confidence that a particular cause is responsible for a given outcome will be reduced (discounted) if there are other plausible causes that might have produced the same outcome (Kelley, 1973). Either a sunny disposition or the desire to land a job is sufficient to make someone act personably in an interview. By pure logic, then, we can’t make a confident attribution. But we supplement the pure logic with our knowledge of what people are like. That knowledge tells us that nearly everyone would act in a personable manner to get the job offer, so we can’t be confident that the applicant’s disposition is all that sunny. We thus discount the possibility that what we’ve seen (a personable demeanor) tells us something about the person involved (he’s personable) because we imagine that nearly everyone would act similarly in that context.

THE INFLUENCE OF WHAT ALMOST HAPPENED When we make causal assessments, our attributions are thus influenced not only by our knowledge of what has actually happened in the past but also by counterfactual thinking (thoughts *counter* to the facts)—considerations of what might have, could have, or should have happened “if only” a few minor things were done differently (J. T. Johnson, 1986; Kahneman & Tversky, 1982; Roese, 1997; Roese & Olson, 1995). “If only I had studied harder” implies that a lack of effort was the cause of a poor test result. “If only the Democrats had nominated a different candidate” implies that the candidate, not the party’s principles, was responsible for an electoral defeat.

Because our attributions influence our emotional reactions to events, our counterfactual thoughts should do so as well. An emotional reaction tends to be more intense if the event almost didn’t happen—a phenomenon known as emotional amplification. Would you feel worse, for example, if someone you loved died in a plane crash after switching her assigned flight at the last minute or after sticking with her assigned flight? Most people say that a last-minute switch would make the loss harder to bear because of the thought that it almost didn’t happen. In general, the pain or joy we derive from any event tends to be proportional to how easy it is to imagine the event not happening.

This psychology of coming close leads to a paradox in the emotional reactions of Olympic athletes to winning a silver or bronze medal instead of the gold. An analysis of athletes’ smiles and grimaces on the medal stand at the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona, Spain, revealed that second-place silver medalists seemed to be less happy than the third-place bronze medalists they had outperformed (Medvec, Madey, & Gilovich, 1995). This finding was replicated at several subsequent Olympics (Hedgcock, Luangrath, & Webster, 2020; Matsumoto & Willingham, 2006).



COUNTERFACTUAL EMOTIONS ON THE OLYMPIC PODIUM The happy athlete on the right won the bronze medal. The unhappy one on the left won the silver medal. The happy bronze medal winner is likely comparing the result to failing to win a medal at all. The gloomy silver medalist is probably contemplating how close she came to the gold.

The reversal of reasonable expectations about athletes' reactions to receiving different medals occurs because silver medalists are consumed by what they did not receive (the coveted gold medal), whereas bronze medalists focus on what they did receive (a medal). Indeed, analyses of athletes' comments during postevent interviews confirmed the suspected difference in their counterfactual thoughts. Silver medalists were more focused on how they could have done better "if only" a few things had gone differently, whereas bronze medalists were more inclined to state that "at least" they received a medal. Second place can thus be a mixed blessing. The triumph over many can get lost in the defeat by one.

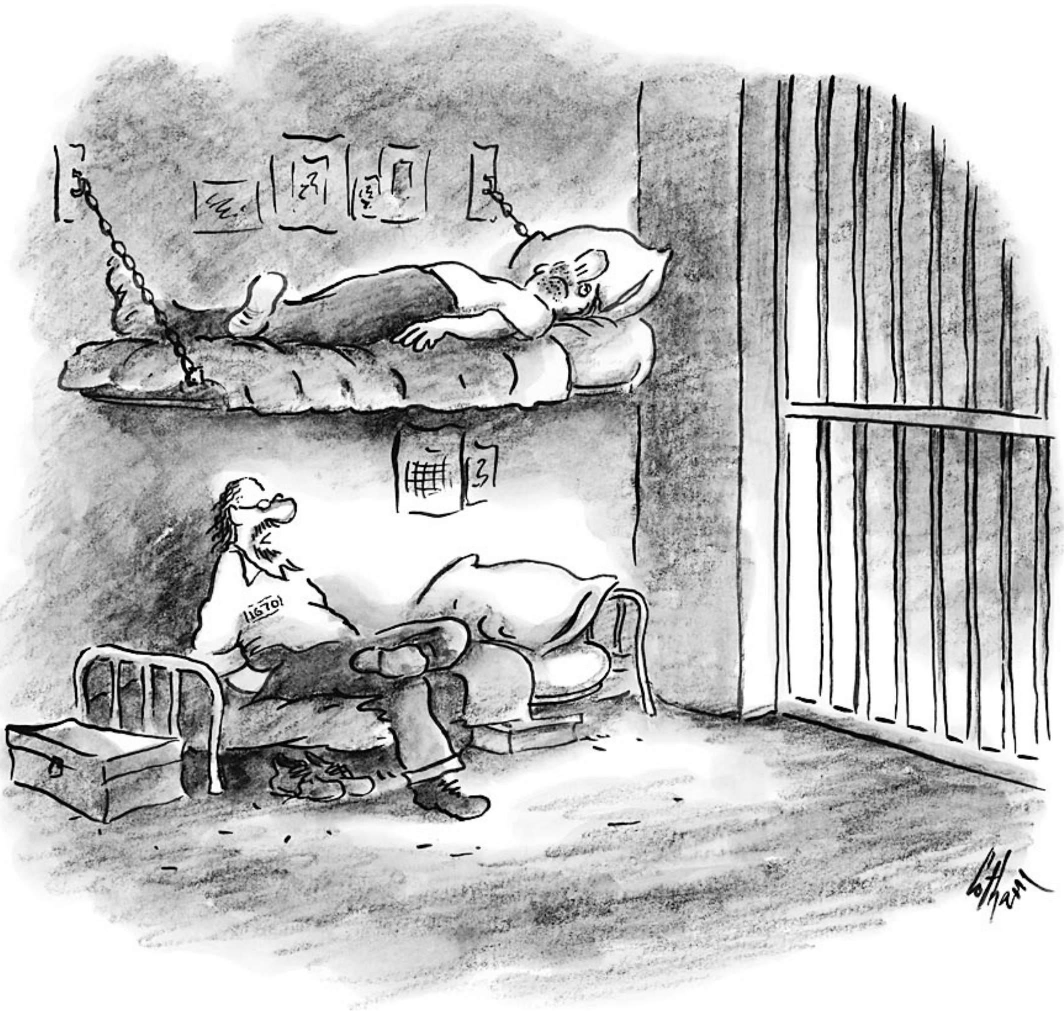
Errors and Biases in Attribution

Although people often rationally infer causes of behavior by following the covariation and discounting principles, sometimes their causal analysis is less than fully rational. Their hopes and fears sometimes color their judgment, they sometimes reason from faulty premises, and they're occasionally misled by dubious information. In other words, people's causal attributions are occasionally subject to predictable errors and biases. Indeed, since the initial development of attribution theory in the late 1960s and early 1970s, social psychologists have spent considerable energy illuminating some of the pitfalls of everyday causal analysis.

The Self-Serving Attributional Bias

One of the most consistent biases in causal assessments is one you have no doubt noticed time and time again: People are inclined to attribute their failures and other bad events to external circumstances but to attribute their successes and other good events to themselves—that is, they’re subject to a self-serving attributional bias (Carver, DeGregorio, & Gillis, 1980; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1982; Mullen & Riordan, 1988). Students, for example, tend to make external attributions for their failures (“The questions were ambiguous”; “The professor is a sadist”) and internal attributions for success (“My hard work paid off”; “I’m smart”). And professors do the same thing when their manuscripts are evaluated for possible publication (“Of course they accepted this brilliant paper”; “They obviously sent this to reviewers who are morons”; Wiley, Crittenden, & Birg, 1979). (But note, as we’re sure we don’t have to tell you, that papers by the authors of this textbook really are rejected only because of theoretical bias or the simple narrow-mindedness of the reviewers.)

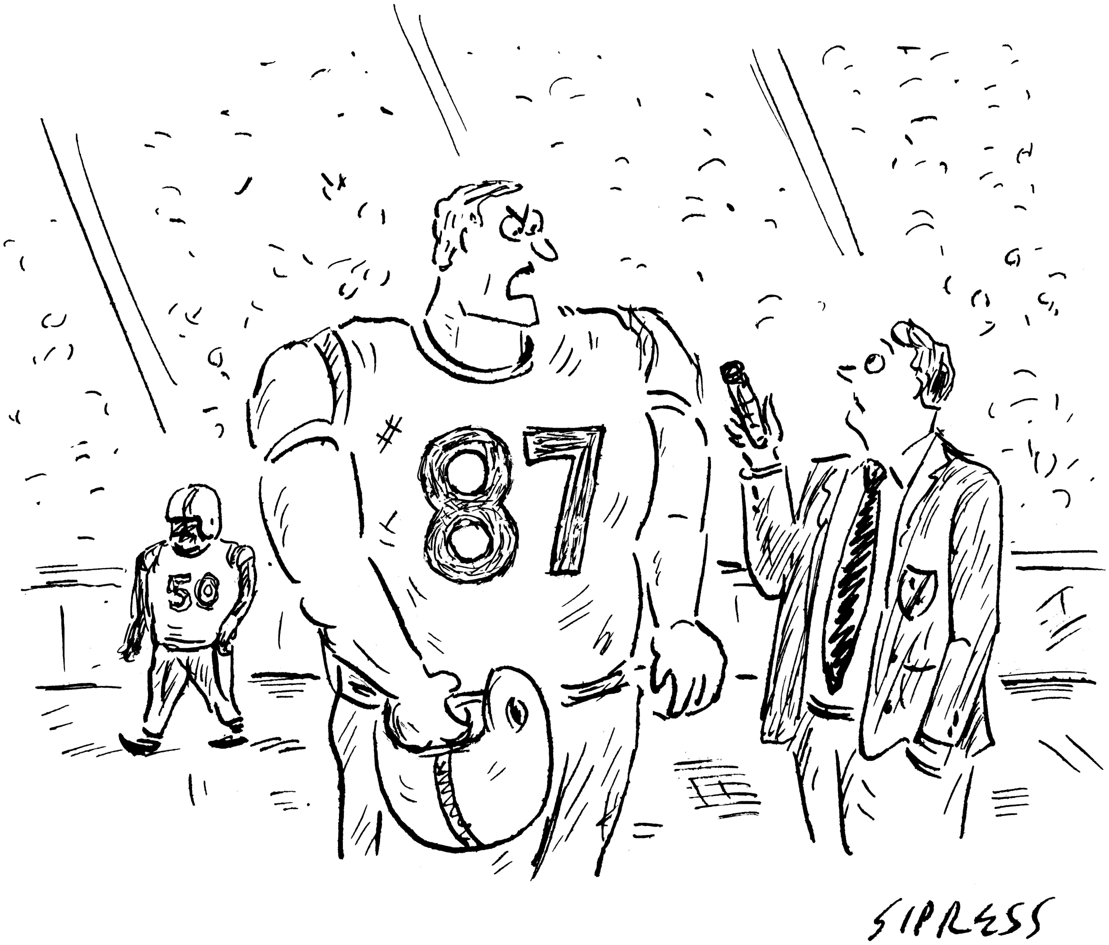
> “Success has a thousand fathers; failure is an orphan.”
>
> - OLD SAYING



“There might have been some carelessness on my part, but it was mostly just good police work.”

Consider your favorite athletes and their coaches. How do they explain their wins and losses, their triumphs and setbacks? Richard Lau and Dan Russell (1980) examined newspaper accounts of the postgame attributions of professional athletes and coaches and found that attributions to one’s own team were much more common for victories than for defeats. In contrast, attributions to external elements (bad calls, bad luck, and so on) were much more common for defeats than for victories. Overall, 80 percent of all attributions for victories were to aspects of one’s own team, but only 53 percent of all attributions for defeats were to one’s own team. Only 20 percent of attributions for victories were to external elements, whereas 47 percent of attributions for defeats were to external elements (see also Roesch & Amirkhan, 1997).

The Fundamental Attribution Error



“First, I’d like to blame the Lord for causing us to lose today.”

Try to recall your initial thoughts about the individuals who delivered the maximum level of electric shock in Milgram’s studies of obedience (again, see Chapters 1 and 8). The participants had to deliver what they thought was more than 400 volts of electricity to another person, over the victim’s protests, as part of a learning experiment (Milgram, 1963, 1974). Nearly two-thirds of all participants followed the instructions. In this case, a straightforward application of the covariation principle would lead to a situational attribution: Because virtually all participants delivered a high level of shock in the face of protests by the “learner” (that is, consensus was high), their behavior doesn’t say much about the individual people involved but rather speaks to something about the situation that made their behavior (surprisingly) common.

If you’re like most people, however, you formed a rather harsh opinion of the participants, thinking of them as unusually cruel and callous, perhaps, or as unusually weak. If so, your judgments reflect a second way that everyday causal attributions often depart from the general principles of attributional analysis. There seems to be a pervasive tendency to see the behavior of others as a reflection of the kind of people they are rather than as a result of the situation they find themselves in.

BOX 4.1

FOCUS ON DAILY LIFE

Self-Serving Attributions

It’s easy to find evidence of self-serving attributional bias in various public documents. When corporations send end-of-year letters to their shareholders, how do you think they account for their business’s triumphs and tribulations? One study found that CEOs claimed credit for 83 percent of all positive events and accepted blame for only 19 percent of all negative events (Salancik & Meindl, 1984). This tendency, furthermore, doesn't seem to serve these managers very well; another study found that CEOs who exhibited the greatest self-serving attributional bias while being interviewed on CNBC were most likely to be fired (Kim, 2013).

Or consider the accident reports that motorists file with their insurance companies after being involved in an auto accident. The externalizing here can be downright comic. One motorist explained, "The telephone pole was approaching; I was attempting to swerve out of its way when it struck my car." Another stated, "A pedestrian hit me and went under my car" (MacCoun, 1993).

These data, of course, require a disclaimer. Unlike more controlled laboratory studies of the self-serving attributional bias, the corporate reports and insurance forms are for public consumption. Perhaps the authors of these reports don't really believe what they're saying; they're just hoping others will swallow it. These examples should thus be taken as extreme illustrations of the self-serving attributional bias, not as solid evidence for it. The real evidence comes from the more carefully controlled studies described in the text.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the tendency to attribute people's behavior to their character or personality, even when powerful situational forces are acting to produce that behavior, is known as the fundamental attribution error (L. Ross, 1977). It's called "fundamental" because the problem being solved (figuring out what someone is like from a sample of behavior) is so essential and because the tendency to think dispositionally (to attribute behavior to the person while ignoring important situational factors) is so common and pervasive.

EXPERIMENTAL DEMONSTRATIONS OF THE FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTION ERROR

Social psychologists have devised a number of experimental paradigms to examine the fundamental attribution error (Gawronski, 2003; D. T. Gilbert & Jones, 1986; D. T. Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Lord et al., 1997; A. G. Miller, Ashton, & Mishal, 1990; A. G. Miller, Jones, & Hinkle, 1981; Van Boven, Kamada, & Gilovich, 1999; Vonk, 1999). The error is often on display when people try to solve an important inferential problem we often face in our daily lives—namely, deciding how much credit to give to those who are succeeding in life and how much blame to direct at those who are not. For example, how much praise and respect should we give to successful entrepreneurs, film stars, and artists? And to what degree should we hold people in poverty accountable for their economic condition? The existence of the fundamental attribution error suggests that people tend to assign too much responsibility to individuals for great accomplishments and terrible mistakes and not enough responsibility to the particular situations those individuals are in, to broader societal forces, or to pure dumb luck.

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SELF-SERVING ATTRIBUTIONAL BIAS Athletes tend to attribute their successes to internal causes like their talents and hard work but to attribute their failures to external causes like bad officiating and bad luck.

ATTRIBUTIONS TO ABILITY We tend to attribute people's successes in life to their inner qualities, such as talent and hard work. We tend to downplay other causes, such as the family connections and early opportunities Kylie Jenner had, which may have played a strong role.

An ingenious study by Lee Ross, Teresa Amabile, and Julia Steinmetz (1977) supports this suggestion. College students took part in a quiz-game competition, much like the television show *Jeopardy*! Half of them were assigned the role of questioner and the other half the role of contestant. The questioner’s job was to think of challenging, but not impossible, general-knowledge questions (“Who were the two coinventors of calculus?”; “Who played the role of Victor Laszlo in the film Casablanca?”), and the contestant would try to answer the questions (click below to see the correct answers).

From a self-presentation standpoint, the questioners had a tremendous advantage. It was relatively easy for them to come off well because they could focus on whatever personal knowledge they happened to have and ignore their various pockets of ignorance. The contestants, however, suffered from the disadvantage of having to field questions about the questioners’ stores of knowledge, which typically didn’t match their own.

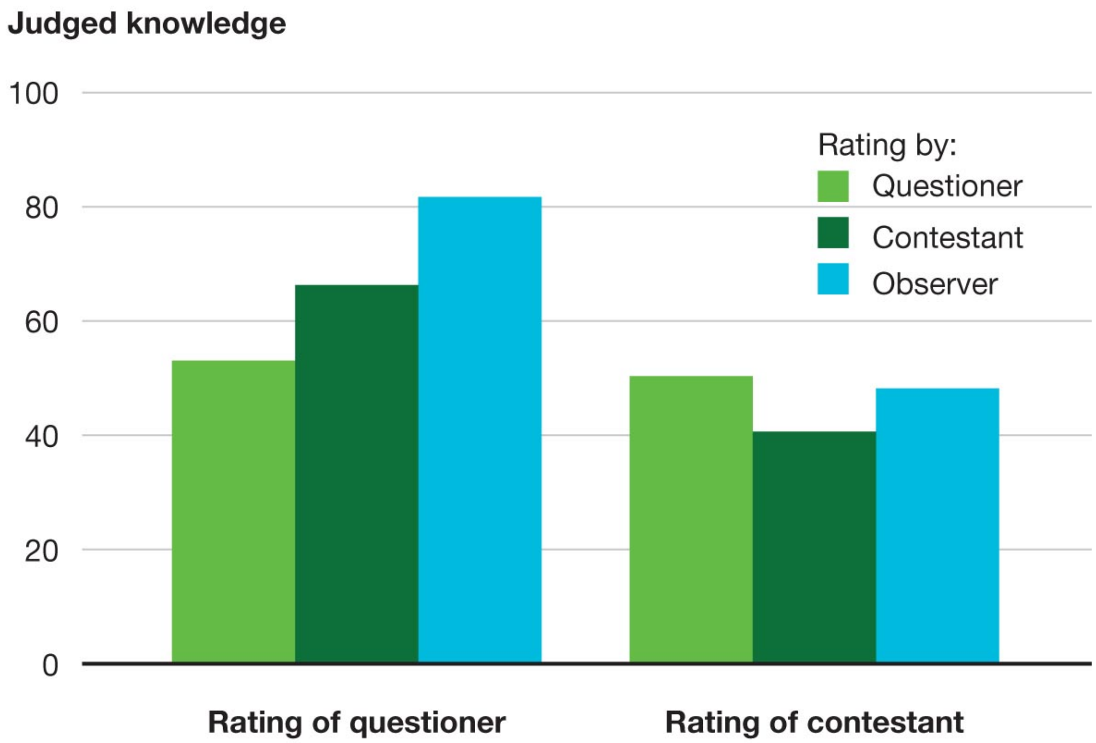


FIGURE 4.2 **ROLE-CONFERRED ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE** The bars show ratings of the general knowledge of the questioner and contestant in the quiz-show experiment. Participants thought the questioners were more knowledgeable than the contestants, even though they knew that both had been randomly assigned to their roles and that the questioners had a much easier task. Source: Adapted from L. Ross et al., 1977.

If participants were thinking logically, they should correct for the relative advantages and disadvantages enjoyed by the questioners and contestants, respectively: Any difference in the questioners and contestants' apparent knowledge and intelligence could easily be explained by their roles. But that was not what happened. Predictably, the hapless contestants failed to answer many of the questions correctly. The contestants came away quite impressed by the questioners' abilities, rating the questioners' knowledge and intelligence more highly than their own. And when the quiz game was later reenacted for a group of observers, they too rated the questioners’ general knowledge more highly than that of the contestants (**Figure 4.2**). Notice that the only people not fooled by the questioners’ performance were the questioners themselves, who rated their own general knowledge and intelligence as roughly equal to that of the average student at their university. The questioners knew they had skipped over yawning gaps in their knowledge base in order to come up with whatever challenging questions they could offer.

ACTOR-OBSERVER DIFFERENCE IN ATTRIBUTIONS Why are people prone to the fundamental attribution error? In part, it’s a result of the tendency to attribute effects to potential causes that stand out perceptually (Lassiter et al., 2002; J. Robinson & McArthur, 1982; E. R. Smith & Miller, 1979). Features of the environment that more readily capture our attention are more likely to be seen as potential causes of an observed effect. And because people are so noticeable and interesting, they tend to capture our attention more than other aspects of the environment. Situations, if attended to at all, may be seen as mere background to people and their actions. This is particularly true of various social determinants of behavior (customs, social norms) that are largely invisible. Attributions to the person, then, have an edge over situational attributions in everyday causal analysis because people are usually more salient than situations.

This leads to a straightforward prediction: We should be more subject to the fundamental attribution error when explaining someone else’s behavior than when explaining our own. After all, the degree to which you’re oriented toward the person versus the situation depends on whether you’re engaged in the action yourself or just observing someone else. In the role of “actor,” you’re usually more interested in determining what kind of situation you’re dealing with than assessing what kind of person you are. In the role of “observer,” in contrast, you’re often primarily interested in determining what kind of person you’re dealing with. Thus, actors should be more likely than observers to make situational attributions for a particular behavior—to see their own behavior as caused by the situation. In contrast, observers of the very same behavior are more likely to focus on the actor’s dispositions. Indeed, there’s considerable evidence for just such a difference (Gioia & Sims, 1985; E. E. Jones & Nisbett, 1972; Pronin, Lin, & Ross, 2002; Saulnier & Perlman, 1981; Schoeneman & Rubanowitz, 1985; D. Watson, 1982; see Malle, 2006, for a dissenting voice).

In one of the most straightforward demonstrations of this actor-observer difference in attribution, participants had to explain why they chose the college major that they did or why their best friends chose the major that they did. When the investigators scored the participants’ explanations, they found that participants more often referred to characteristics of the person when explaining someone else’s choice than they did when explaining their own choice. They typically focused on the specifics of the major when explaining their own choice. You might attribute your own decision to major in psychology, for instance, to the facts that the material is fascinating, the textbooks beautifully written, and the professors dynamic and accessible. In contrast, you might attribute your friend’s decision to major in psychology to “issues” he needs to work out (Nisbett et al., 1973).

This phenomenon has significant implications for human conflict, both between individuals and between nations. Married couples, for example, often squabble over attributional differences. Raphael may blame a late meeting or unusually heavy traffic to explain why an errand didn’t get done, whereas his husband may be more inclined to argue that he’s lazy, inattentive, or “just doesn’t care.” Similarly, at the national level, the United States is likely to explain the stationing of its troops in so many locations across the globe as a necessary defense against immediate and future threats. Other countries may be more inclined to see it as a manifestation of U.S. imperialism.

Culture and Causal Attribution

Much of what psychologists know about how people understand the behavior of others is undoubtedly universal. People everywhere are likely to engage in counterfactual thinking, imagining outcomes that might have occurred when trying to understand what did happen. People everywhere probably perceive the causes of their own behavior somewhat differently than they perceive the causes of other people’s behavior. But there are also some basic differences in how people from different cultures understand the causes of behavior. Some of these differences can be anticipated on the basis of what we have discussed already about cultural differences in perception and in characteristic social relations.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN ATTENDING TO CONTEXT Most of the world’s people tend to pay more attention than Westerners do to social situations and the people who are involved in them. The kinds of social factors that are merely background for North Americans appear to be more salient to people from other cultures (Hedden et al., 2000; Ji, Schwarz, & Nisbett, 2000). Recall from Chapters 1 and 3 that, in general, Westerners define themselves in terms of their relationships with others less often than other people throughout the world do. Westerners think about themselves more in the context of personal goals, attributes, and preferences, whereas non-Westerners think about themselves more in terms of the social roles they occupy and their obligations to other people and institutions. Non-Westerners therefore have to pay more attention to others and to the details of the situations they find themselves in because effective action typically requires that they coordinate their actions with those of other people.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN ATTRIBUTION Attributions of Western reporters for outcomes of sporting events tend to emphasize the traits and abilities of individual players. Attributions of East Asian reporters tend to emphasize the setting, the recent history of the two teams' experience, and other contextual factors.

East Asians and Westerners do indeed differ in how much attention they give to context, even when perceiving inanimate objects. Shinobu Kitayama and his colleagues (Kitayama et al., 2003) demonstrated this difference in a study with Japanese and American participants (**Figure 4.3**). After examining a square with a line drawn at the bottom, the participants went to another part of the room and saw a square of a different size. They then had to draw either a line of the same length as the original or a line having the same length *in relation to* the original square. The Americans were better at the absolute judgment, which required ignoring the context, whereas the Japanese were better at the relative judgment, which required paying attention to the context.

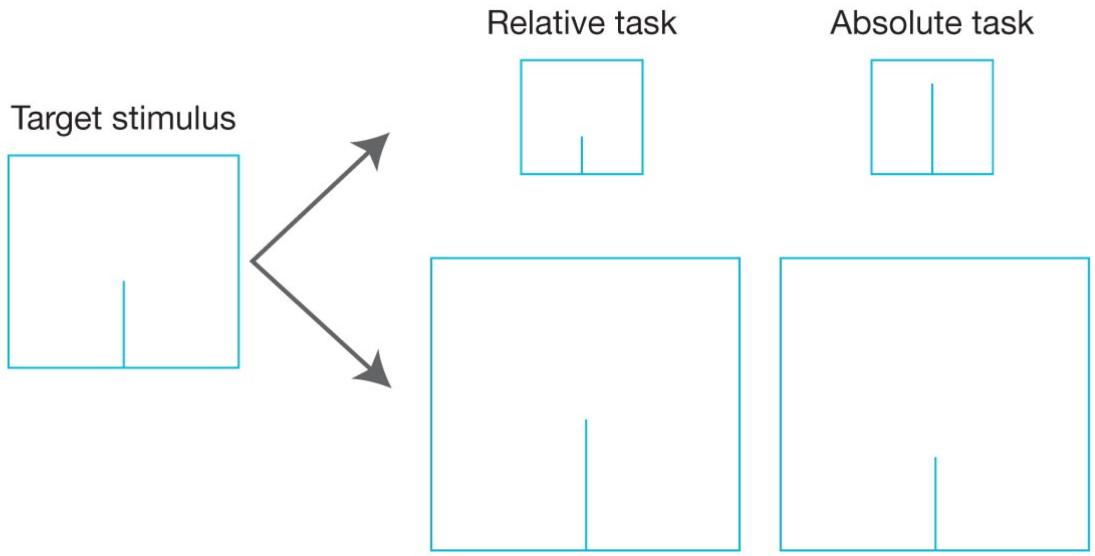


FIGURE 4.3 **SENSITIVITY TO CONTEXT AND THE FRAMED LINE TASK** After seeing the target stimulus, participants were asked to draw a vertical line at the bottom of an empty square. In the relative task, the line must be drawn in the same *proportion* to the square as it was originally. In the absolute task, the new line must be exactly the same length as the original line. Japanese participants performed

better at the relative task and Americans performed better at the absolute task. Source: Adapted from Kitayama et al., 2003.

Trey Hedden and his colleagues (2008) used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to examine activation in the frontoparietal area of the brain, which is associated with difficult perceptual judgments, while participants were completing the line-judgment task used by Kitayama and colleagues. There was more activity in that region when participants had to do the task that did not come as naturally to them: East Asians showed more activity when assessing absolute line length (and thus had to *ignore* the context), and Westerners showed more activity when making proportional judgments (and thus had to *attend to* the context).

CAUSAL ATTRIBUTION FOR INDEPENDENT AND INTERDEPENDENT PEOPLES

Given the pronounced difference between East Asians’ and Westerners’ attention to context, it should come as no surprise to learn that East Asians are more inclined than Westerners to attribute an actor’s behavior to the situation rather than to the person’s dispositions. For example, attributions for the outcomes of sports events are not the same in interdependent cultures as they are in independent cultures. Coaches and players on sports teams in the United States tend to see positive outcomes as the result of individual players’ abilities and coaches’ actions (“We’ve got a very good keeper in Bo Oshoniyi, who was defensive MVP of the finals last year”; R. R. Lau & Russell, 1980). In contrast, the attributions of Hong Kong coaches and players are more likely to refer to the other team and the context (“I guess South China was a bit tired after having played in a quadrangular tournament”; F. Lee, Hallahan, & Herzog, 1996).

Does this mean that people from interdependent cultures are less prone to the fundamental attribution error? It does indeed. Although Easterners are not entirely immune from the error (I. Choi & Nisbett, 1998; Kitayama & Masuda, 1997; Krull et al., 1996), there is evidence that the fundamental attribution error is more widespread and pronounced for Westerners than for Easterners. For example, Na and Kitayama (2011) presented participants with information about a person that could be expected to lead them to make an inference about the person’s personality. The statement “She checked twice to see if the gas was on in the stove before she left” might lead a participant to infer that the person was *careful*. When participants were later shown a picture of the person along with the word *reckless*, the American participants exhibited a pattern of brain activity associated with surprise, but the Korean participants did not. Thus, East Asians are not just more likely to notice situational cues that might correct a dispositional inference; they appear to be less likely to make a dispositional inference in the first place.

There are also differences in attributional tendencies among American subcultures. Puerto Rican children describe themselves using fewer traits than European-American children do (D. Hart, Lucca-Irizarry, & Damon, 1986), and they are less likely to use traits to describe other people’s behavior (Newman, 1991). Mexicans and Mexican Americans are also less likely than Anglo-Americans to make trait inferences (Zárate, Uleman, & Voils, 2001).

Gender and Attribution

There are also some notable gender differences in attribution, especially in terms of whether a person is likely to make a situational or dispositional attribution for success versus failure. Men and boys are more likely than women and girls to attribute their failures to lack of effort, and women and girls are more likely than boys to attribute their failures to lack of ability (Dweck, 1986; Dweck et al., 1978; M. A. Lewis & Sullivan, 2005; Whitley & Frieze, 1985). This is especially true for performance in math and science (Ryckman & Peckham, 1987).

In pioneering work on this subject, Carol Dweck and her colleagues found that this difference results in part from teachers' feedback patterns in elementary school classrooms (Dweck et al., 1978). Although the girls, on average, outperformed the boys in school, teachers' negative comments about the girls' performance tended to be directed at intellectual inadequacies ("This is not right, Lisa"). In contrast, criticism of the boys' work tended to refer to nonintellectual factors ("This is messy, Bill"). Positive evaluations were related to the intellectual quality of girls' performance less than 80 percent of the time; for boys, it was 94 percent of the time. From these data, Dweck and her colleagues argued that girls learn that criticism means they may lack intellectual ability, whereas boys learn that criticism may just mean they haven't worked hard enough or paid enough attention to detail. Similarly, girls are likely to learn that praise may be unrelated to the intellectual quality of their performance, whereas boys learn that praise means that their intellectual performance was excellent (Good, Rattan, & Dweck, 2012).

When Dweck and her colleagues performed an experiment in which they gave both boys and girls the same kind of feedback—either the kind that girls typically receive or the kind that boys typically receive—they found that *both* genders tended to view subsequent failures accordingly, either as a reflection of their lack of ability or as a reflection of their lack of effort and attention to detail (Dweck et al., 1978). Therefore, whatever other reasons there may be for boys routinely taking credit for their successes and dismissing their failures and for girls' more modest attributions, these patterns are reinforced by the treatment they receive in the classroom (Espinoza, Arêas da Luz Fontes, & Arms-Chavez, 2014).

LOOKING BACK

People assign causes to events by employing the logic of covariation and by engaging in counterfactual thinking. Their thoughts about events that almost occurred influence not only their attributions but also their emotional reactions to what actually happened. People’s attributions are also subject to several predictable biases, including a self-serving bias whereby success is attributed to the self and failure to the situation. People are also prone to the fundamental attribution error, attributing behavior to personal characteristics even when powerful situational forces are at play. This tendency is more pronounced when people explain others’ behavior than when they explain their own. People in interdependent cultures pay more attention to social context than Westerners do and are less prone to the fundamental attribution error. Women and girls are more likely than men and boys to attribute their failures to lack of ability, especially in math and science.

Glossary

covariation principle
The idea that behavior should be attributed to potential causes that occur along with the observed behavior.

consensus
A type of covariation information: whether most people would behave the same way or differently in a given situation.

distinctiveness

A type of covariation information: whether a behavior is unique to a particular situation or occurs in many or all situations.

discounting principle

The idea that people will assign reduced weight to a particular cause of behavior if other plausible causes might have produced the same behavior.

counterfactual thinking

Thoughts of what might have, could have, or should have happened “if only” something had occurred differently.

emotional amplification

An increase in an emotional reaction to an event that is proportional to how easy it is to imagine the event not happening.

self-serving attributional bias

The tendency to attribute failure and other bad events to external circumstances and to attribute success and other good events to oneself.

fundamental attribution error

The failure to recognize the importance of situational influences on behavior, along with the corresponding tendency to overemphasize the importance of dispositions on behavior.

actor-observer difference

A difference in attribution based on who is making the causal assessment: the actor (who is relatively inclined to make situational attributions) or the observer (who is relatively inclined to make dispositional attributions).

How Information Is Presented

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Explain how the order in which information is presented can affect judgment.
- Summarize some of the rules of effective message framing.
- Explain what is meant by “psychological distance” and how it influences the judgments we make.

Our judgments about the social world—whether someone can be trusted, whether someone deserves her status in life, whether a pandemic or a democracy will end—are based not only on *what* information is available to us but also on *how* that information is presented. The marketing and advertising of products, for example, is based on that truism. And indeed, countless studies have demonstrated that slight variations in the presentation of information—*how* it is presented and even *when* it is presented—can have profound effects on people’s judgments.

Order Effects

We all have an intuitive understanding that the order in which we receive information makes a difference. This is why we worry so much about whether we should go first or last in any kind of performance—interviewing for a job, say, or giving a classroom presentation. Sometimes the information presented first exerts the most influence, a phenomenon known as a primacy effect. Other times the information presented last has the most impact, a phenomenon known as a recency effect. These two are collectively referred to as *order effects* (Strack, Martin, & Schwarz, 1988; see also Haberstroh et al., 2002; Tourangeau, Rasinski, & Bradburn, 1991).

As a rough general rule, primacy effects most often occur when the information is ambiguous. In these cases, what comes first influences how the later information is interpreted. Consider a study in which Solomon Asch (1946) asked people to evaluate a hypothetical individual described by the following terms: intelligent, industrious, impulsive, critical, stubborn, and envious. Participants rated the individual favorably, no doubt because of the influence of the two very positive terms that began the list—*intelligent* and *industrious*. A second group read the same trait adjectives in the opposite order and formed a much less favorable impression because the first two descriptive terms—*stubborn* and *envious*—were negative. Thus, there was a substantial primacy effect. Traits presented at the beginning of the list had more impact than those presented later on. Etiquette books (and your parents) are right: First impressions are crucial. Note that all the traits in Asch's experiment have different shades of meaning, and how each is construed depends on the information already encountered. Take the word *stubborn*. When it follows positive traits, such as *intelligent* and *industrious*, people interpret it charitably, as steadfast or determined. However, when it follows *envious*, it is seen more negatively, as closed-minded or rigid (Asch & Zukier, 1984; Biernat, Manis, & Kobrynowicz, 1997; D. L. Hamilton & Zanna, 1974).

Recency effects, in contrast, typically result when the last items come more readily to mind. Remembered information obviously receives greater weight than forgotten information, so later items sometimes exert more influence on judgment than information presented earlier.

Framing Effects

Order effects are a type of framing effect: The way information is presented, including the order of presentation, can “frame” the way it’s processed and understood. Consider the (probably apocryphal) story of the monk whose request to smoke while he prayed was met with a disapproving stare by his superior. When he mentioned this to a friend, he was told: “Ask a different question. Ask if you can pray while you smoke.” The request is the same in both versions, but there is a subtle difference in the frame of reference. The latter presupposes smoking; the former doesn’t.

Order effects are a type of “pure” framing effect: The frame of reference is changed by reordering the information even though the content of the information remains exactly the same.

SPIN FRAMING Framing effects aren’t limited to the order in which information is presented. *Spin framing* is a form of framing that varies the content, not just the order, of what is presented. A company whose product is of a higher quality than competing products will introduce information that frames the consumer’s choice as one of quality. Another company whose product has a lower price will feature information that frames the consumer’s choice as one of savings.

Participants in political debates use spin framing to highlight some aspects of an issue but not others. Candidates on different sides of the abortion debate, for instance, try to win over public opinion by using the terms “pro-choice,” “pro-life,” and, more recently, “government-mandated pregnancies.” Similarly, we hear advocates of different positions talk of “illegal aliens” versus “undocumented workers,” “torture” versus “enhanced interrogation,” and “election integrity” versus “voter suppression.” The power of such terms to frame, or spin, the relevant issues led the United States in 1947 to change the name of the War Department to the more benign-sounding Defense Department.

ELECTIONS
ELECTIONS

SPIN FRAMING Describing voting legislation as “voter suppression” casts such efforts in a much more negative light than describing them as “election integrity” measures.

Politicians (and some polling organizations with a political mission) engage in spin framing when they conduct opinion polls to measure support for their positions. People are more likely to say that they are in favor of repealing a “death” tax than an “inheritance” tax. And asking people whether they are in favor of “tax relief” is almost guaranteed to elicit strong support because the very word *relief* implies that taxes are a burden from which relief is needed (Lakoff, 2004). Because it’s so easy to slant public opinion in a given direction, it’s important to check a poll’s source (and whether the source is likely to want to find a particular result) and to be mindful of the exact wording of the poll’s questions. As former Israeli prime minister Shimon Peres noted, opinion polls are “like perfume—nice to smell, dangerous to swallow.”

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE FRAMING Nearly everything in life is a mixture of good and bad. Ice cream tastes great, but it’s full of saturated fat. Loyalty is a virtue, but it can make a person blind to another’s faults. The mixed nature of most things means that they can be described, or framed, in ways that emphasize the good or the bad, with predictable effects on people’s judgments. A piece of meat described as 75 percent lean seems more appealing than one described as 25 percent fat (Levin & Gaeth, 1988); people feel much safer using a condom described as having a 90 percent success rate than one described as having a 10 percent failure rate (Linville, Fischer, & Fischhoff, 1993). Notice that the exact same information is provided in each frame; only the focus is different. Also note that there is no “correct” frame. It is every bit as accurate to state that a piece of meat is 75 percent lean as it is to state that it is 25 percent fat.

75% Lean

POSITIVE VERSUS NEGATIVE FRAMING A piece of meat that is 75 percent lean is no different from one that is 25 percent fat, but one label emphasizes the negative, making the meat seem less appealing, and the other emphasizes the positive.

These sorts of framing effects can influence judgments and decisions of the greatest consequence, even among individuals with considerable expertise on the topic in question. In one study, for example, more than 400 physicians were asked whether they would recommend surgery or radiation for patients diagnosed with a certain type of cancer (McNeil et al., 1982). Some were told that of 100 previous patients who had the surgery, 90 lived through the postoperative period, 68 were still alive after a year, and 34 were still alive after five years. Eighty-two percent of these physicians recommended surgery. Others were given exactly the same information, but it was framed in different language: that 10 died during surgery or the postoperative period, 32 had died by the end of the first year, and 66 had died by the end of five years. Only 56 percent of the physicians given the information in this form recommended surgery.

Because negative information tends to attract more attention and have a greater psychological impact than positive information (Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001), information framed in negative terms tends to elicit a stronger response. The results just described reflect that tendency: Ten people dying sounds more threatening than 90 out of 100 surviving. “Make America Great Again” is a more powerful slogan than “Make America Great” because it channels people’s (negative) feelings about what has presumably been lost into an effort to restore it.

Temporal Framing

Suppose one of your friends emails you today and asks if you can come over next Saturday morning at 9:00 to help him move. You’re free that day, and he’s a good friend, so of course you say yes. Now suppose that on a Saturday morning at 8:30, your friend emails to ask if you can come over in half an hour to help him move. It’s cold out, and you still feel sleepy, so you write back that you’re not feeling well—or maybe you don't write back at all, pretending you never saw the email. Why were you so eager to help when asked a week in advance but so reluctant when asked on the day in question?

You probably have had similar feelings of being at odds with a decision made by an earlier version of yourself. Your earlier self might have thought it was a good idea to take an extra-heavy course load this semester, but now your present self is frazzled and sleep deprived. How could you have thought this would be a good idea?

Why does something often seem like a brilliant idea at one time and a terrible idea at another? The key to understanding this type of disparity is to recognize that we think about actions and events within a particular time perspective—a *temporal frame*—belonging to the distant past, the present moment, the immediate future, and so on.

According to construal level theory, the temporal perspective from which people view events has important and predictable implications for how they construe them (Fiedler, 2007; Fujita et al., 2006; Liberman, Sagristano, & Trope, 2002; Trope & Liberman, 2003, 2010, 2012). Any action or event can be thought of at a low level of abstraction, rich in concrete detail—for example, chewing your food, carrying a friend's couch up the stairs, or putting a dollar in a donation jar. But actions and events can also be thought of at a higher level of abstraction, rich in meaning but stripped of detail—dining out, helping a friend, or being generous (recall the discussion in Chapter 3 about the role of high-level versus low-level construals in self-control). It turns out that we tend to think of distant events, those from long ago or far off in the future, in abstract terms, and we tend to think of events close at hand in concrete terms. Next month you'll help a friend move, but later this afternoon you'll be carrying your friend's couch up the stairs.

TEMPORAL DISTANCE AND CONSTRUAL When an event is far in the future, we think of it in broad, abstract terms (for example, broadening my horizons); when an event is close at hand, we think about it in narrower, more concrete terms (for example, packing for the trip).

This difference in construal has important implications for what people think and how they act in their everyday lives, and it explains many inconsistent preferences. Decisions that sound great in the abstract are sometimes less thrilling when fleshed out in all their concrete detail, so we regret making some commitments. You think of a heavy course load a year from now as “furthering my education,” or “expanding my horizons.” That sounds great, so you accept the challenge. But when the time comes, you experience the heavy course load as “studying” or “spending time in the library,” which is less inspiring, so you question your earlier decision to take on this burden. In contrast, sometimes decisions are more enticing at the concrete level and less desirable at the abstract level, producing the opposite sort of inconsistency. At the abstract level, you might have sworn that you’d stick to your diet no matter what (because you don’t want to “pig out”), yet when you’re standing in front of the buffet, you find it easy to indulge (because you’re only “sampling the different options”).

LOOKING BACK

The way information is presented can affect judgment. Primacy effects occur when information presented first has more impact than information presented later, often because the initial information influences the way later information is construed. Recency effects occur when information presented later is better remembered and thus has more impact. People are also susceptible to how information is framed. Sometimes people deliberately spin information so as to influence others’ judgments by changing the frame of reference. The temporal framing of an event—whether it will occur soon or far in the future—also influences how people think about it. Far-off events are construed in more abstract terms, and imminent events are construed more concretely.

Glossary

primacy effect	A type of order effect whereby the information presented first in a body of evidence has a disproportionate influence on judgment.
recency effect	A type of order effect whereby the information presented last in a body of evidence has a disproportionate influence on judgment.
framing effect	The influence on judgment resulting from the way information is presented, including the words used to describe the information or the order in which it is presented.
construal level theory	A theory about the relationship between temporal distance (and other kinds of distance) and abstract or concrete thinking: Psychologically distant actions and events are thought about in abstract terms; actions and events that are close at hand are thought about in concrete terms.

How We Seek Information

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe the confirmation bias and how deeply ingrained it is.
- Explain how our wants and needs can influence the confirmation bias.

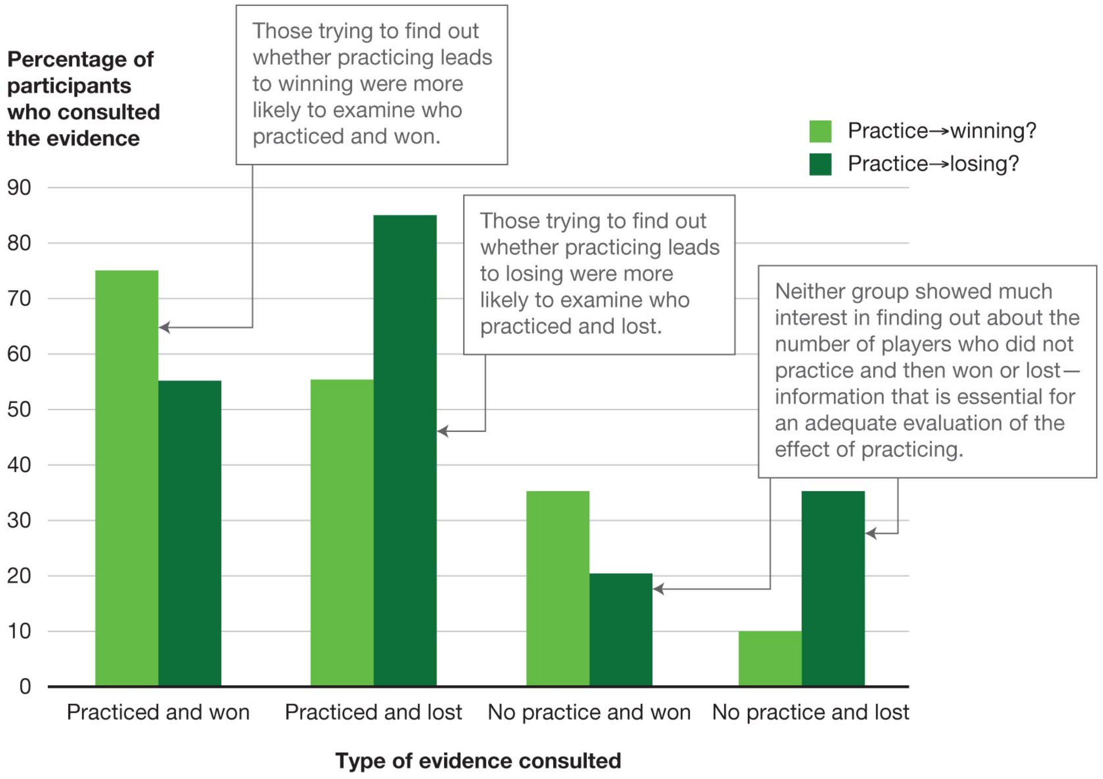
Suppose a friend gives you several potted plants for your dorm room or apartment and says, “I’ m not sure, but they might need frequent watering. You should check that out.” How would you go about checking? If you’ re like most people, you would water them often and see how they do. What you would *not* do is give a lot of water to some, very little to the others, and compare the results.

Confirmation Bias

When evaluating a proposition (a plant needs frequent watering; a generous allowance spoils a child; Cuban Americans are family oriented), people more readily, reliably, and robustly seek out evidence that would support the proposition rather than information that would contradict the proposition. This tendency is known as the confirmation bias (Klayman & Ha, 1987; Skov & Sherman, 1986).

In one study that examined the confirmation bias, Jennifer Crocker asked one group of participants to determine whether working out the day before an important tennis match makes a player more likely to win (Crocker, 1982). Another group was asked to determine whether working out the day before a match makes a player more likely to *lose*. Both groups could examine any of four types of information before coming to a conclusion: the number of players in a sample who worked out the previous day and won their match, the number of players who worked out and lost, the number of players who didn’t work out the previous day and won, and the number of players who didn’t work out and lost. In fact, all four types of information are needed to make a valid determination. You have to calculate and compare the success rate of those who worked out the day before the match with the success rate of those who didn’t. If the first ratio is higher than the second, then working out the day before increases a player’s chances of winning.

But participants tended not to seek out all the necessary information. Instead, as **Figure 4.4** makes clear, participants exhibited the confirmation bias: They were especially interested in examining the information that could potentially confirm the proposition they were investigating. Those trying to find out whether working out the day before leads to winning were more interested in the number of players who worked out and won than those trying to find out whether working out leads to losing—and vice versa (Crocker, 1982).



Those trying to find out whether practicing leads to winning were more likely to examine who practiced and won.

Those trying to find out whether practicing leads to losing were more likely to examine who practiced and lost.

Neither group showed much interest in finding out about the number of players who did not practice and then won or lost—information that is essential for an adequate evaluation of the effect of practicing.

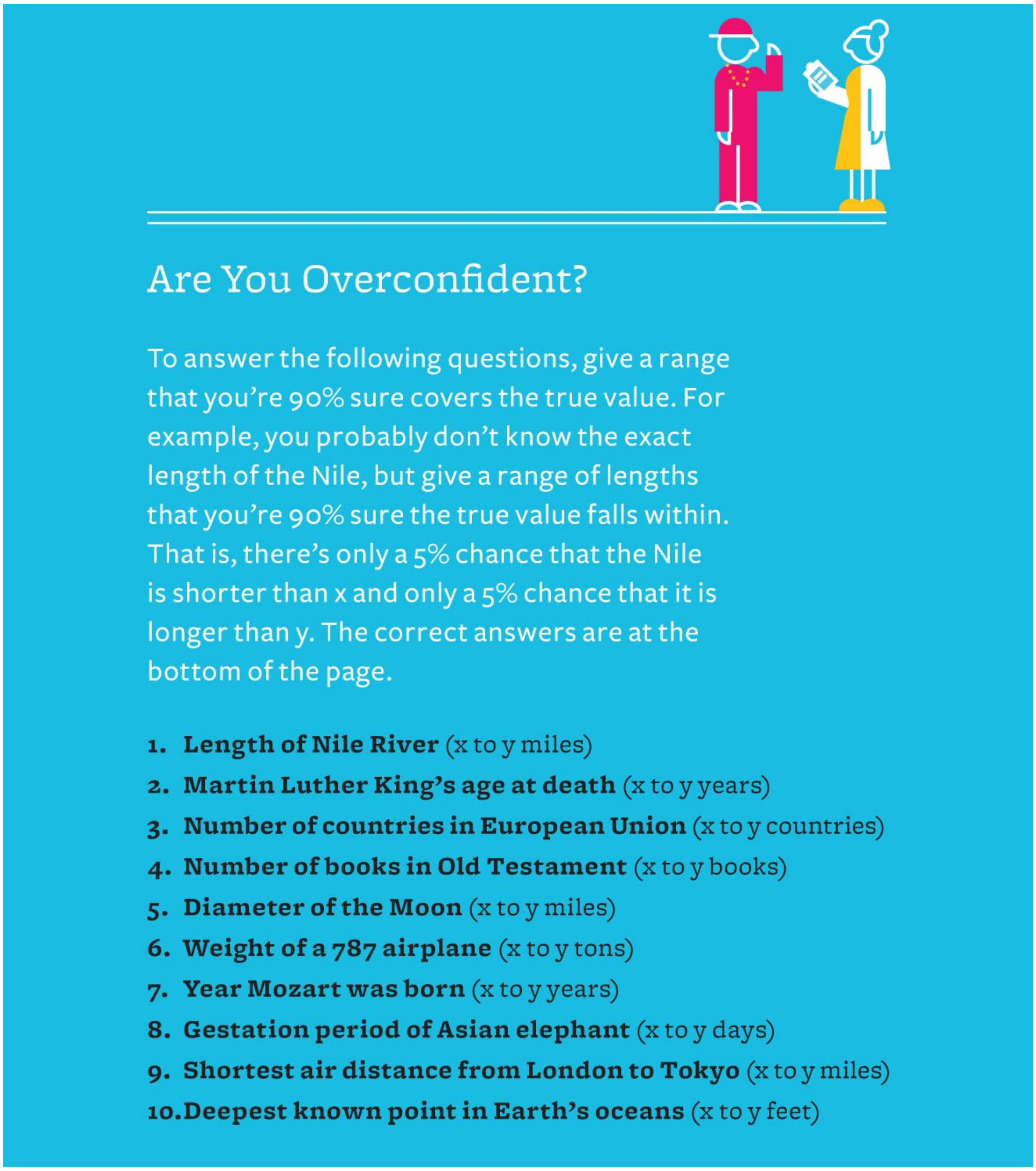
FIGURE 4.4 **THE CONFIRMATION BIAS** Light green bars represent the responses of participants trying to determine whether working out the day before a tennis match makes a player more likely to win. Dark green bars represent the responses of participants trying to find out whether working out the day before makes a player more likely to lose. Source: Adapted from Crocker, 1982.

This tendency to seek confirming information can lead to all sorts of false beliefs because we can find supportive evidence for almost anything (Gilovich, 1991; Shermer, 1997). Are people more likely to come to harm when there is a full moon? There will certainly be many months in which hospital ERs are unusually busy during the full moon. Do optimistic people live longer? You can probably think of some very elderly people who are unusually upbeat. But evidence consistent with a proposition is not enough to draw a firm conclusion, as there might be even more evidence against it—more days with empty ERs during the full moon, more pessimists living long lives. The danger of the confirmation bias, then, is that if we look mainly for one type of evidence, we are likely to find it. To truly test a proposition, we must seek out the evidence against it as well as the evidence for it.

A CLOSER LOOK

Overconfidence: A Pervasive Bias of Human Judgment

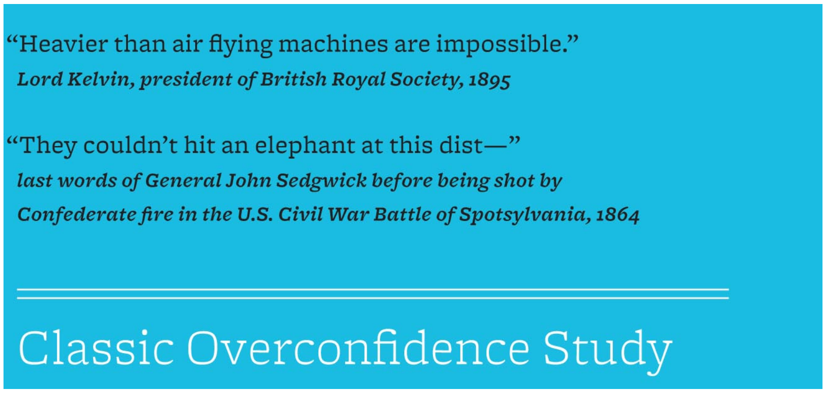
The overconfidence bias, the tendency for individuals to have greater confidence in their judgments and decisions than their actual accuracy merits, is one of the most pronounced and consistent biases documented by psychologists. If people were perfectly “calibrated,” their accuracy would match their confidence. They would be 100% accurate when they are 100% confident, 70% accurate when they are 70% confident, and so forth. But people’s confidence frequently exceeds their accuracy, and this bias appears in numerous areas, including physical ability, test performance, and general knowledge.



Are You Overconfident?

To answer the following questions, give a range that you're 90% sure covers the true value. For example, you probably don't know the exact length of the Nile, but give a range of lengths that you're 90% sure the true value falls within. That is, there's only a 5% chance that the Nile is shorter than x and only a 5% chance that it is longer than y. The correct answers are at the bottom of the page.

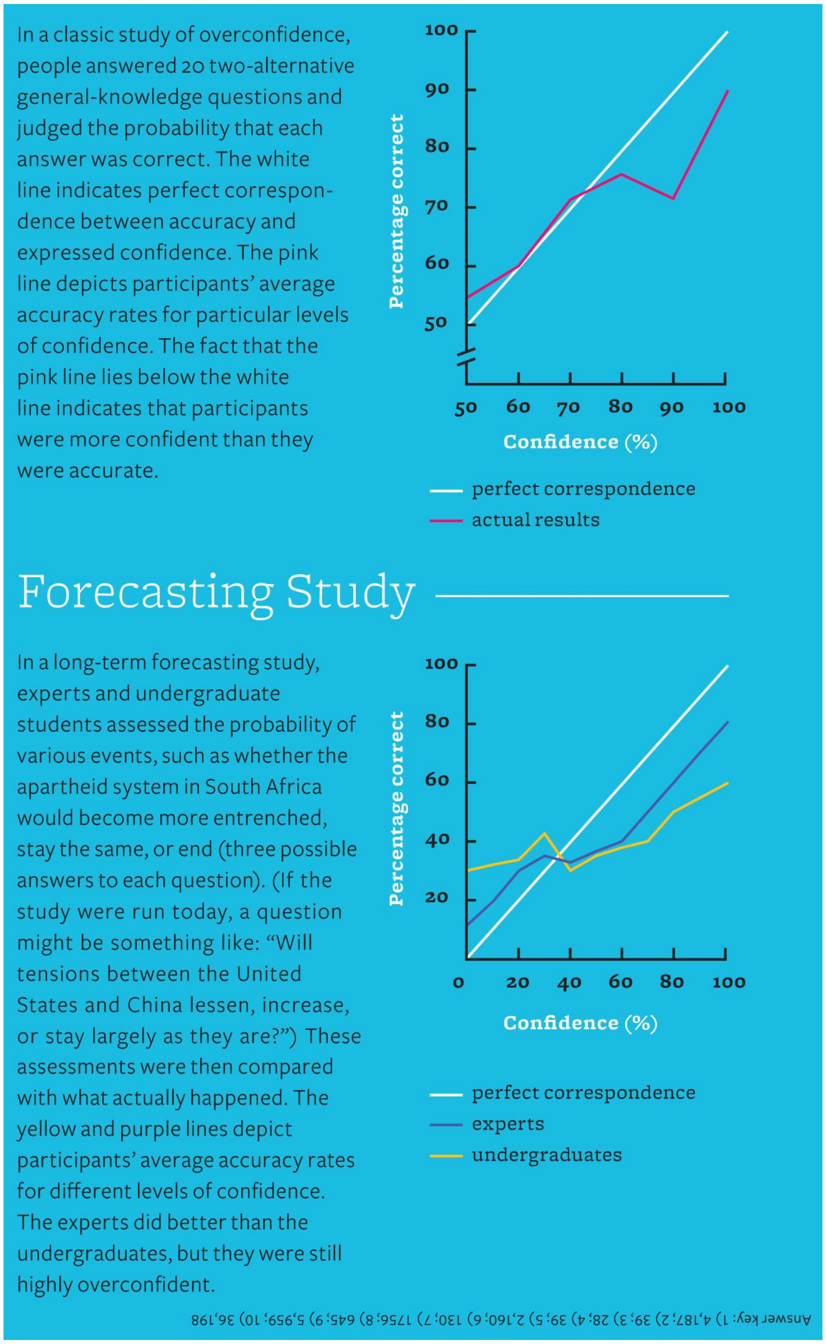
1. **Length of Nile River** (x to y miles)
2. **Martin Luther King's age at death** (x to y years)
3. **Number of countries in European Union** (x to y countries)
4. **Number of books in Old Testament** (x to y books)
5. **Diameter of the Moon** (x to y miles)
6. **Weight of a 787 airplane** (x to y tons)
7. **Year Mozart was born** (x to y years)
8. **Gestation period of Asian elephant** (x to y days)
9. **Shortest air distance from London to Tokyo** (x to y miles)
10. **Deepest known point in Earth's oceans** (x to y feet)



"Heavier than air flying machines are impossible."
Lord Kelvin, president of British Royal Society, 1895

"They couldn't hit an elephant at this dist—"
last words of General John Sedgwick before being shot by Confederate fire in the U.S. Civil War Battle of Spotsylvania, 1864

Classic Overconfidence Study



In a classic study of overconfidence, people answered 20 two-alternative general-knowledge questions and judged the probability that each answer was correct. The white line indicates perfect correspondence between accuracy and expressed confidence. The pink line depicts participants' average accuracy rates for particular levels of confidence. The fact that the pink line lies below the white line indicates that participants were more confident than they were accurate.

Percentage correct
100
90
80
70
60
50
50
60
70
80
90
100
Confidence (%)
perfect correspondence
actual results

Forecasting Study

In a long-term forecasting study, experts and undergraduate students assessed the probability of various events, such as whether the apartheid system in South Africa would become more entrenched, stay the same, or end (three possible answers to each question). (If the study were run today, a question might be something like: "Will tensions between the United States and China lessen, increase, or stay largely as they are?") These assessments were then compared with what actually happened. The yellow and purple lines depict participants' average accuracy rates for different levels of confidence. The experts did better than the undergraduates, but they were still highly overconfident.

Percentage correct
100
80
60
40
20
0
20
40
60
80
100
Confidence (%)
perfect correspondence
experts
undergraduates

Answer key: 1) 4,187; 2) 39; 3) 28; 4) 39; 5) 2,160; 6) 130; 7) 1756; 8) 645; 9) 5,959; 10) 36,198

Sources: Quotations and overconfidence text: Adapted from Russo & Shoemaker, 1990; Classic study: Koriat, Lichtenstein, & Fischhoff, 1980; Experts/undergraduates study: Tetlock, 2005.

SEARCHING FOR EVIDENCE THAT FITS OUR BELIEFS People who deny the reality of global warming often seize on episodes like these to support their skepticism (“Would we have weather like this if the planet were really getting warmer?”). Those who are worried about climate change are likely to seize on them to support *their* view (“This is precisely the extreme weather we can expect as a result of climate change”).

In the social realm, the confirmation bias can lead people to ask questions that shape the answers they get, thereby providing illusory support for the very thing they’re trying to find out. In one telling study, researchers asked one group of participants to interview someone and determine whether the target person was an extravert; another group was asked to determine whether the target person was an introvert (Snyder & Swann, 1978). Participants selected their interview questions from a list provided. Those charged with determining whether the target was an extravert tended to ask questions that focused on sociability (“In what situations are you most talkative?”). Those charged with determining whether the target was an introvert tended to ask questions that focused on social withdrawal (“In what situations do you wish you could be more outgoing?”). Of course, if you ask people about times when they are most sociable, they are likely to answer in ways that make them seem relatively outgoing, even if they aren’t. And if you ask about their social reticence, they will almost certainly answer in ways that make them seem relatively introverted—again, even if they aren’t. In a powerful demonstration of this tendency, the investigators tape-recorded the interview sessions, edited out the questions, and then played the interviewees’ responses to another, uninformed set of participants. These latter participants rated those who had been interviewed by someone testing for extraversion as more outgoing than those who had been interviewed by someone testing for introversion.

It’s easy to see how the confirmation bias, in concert with all the information available on the internet, can result in highly polarized beliefs. If you want to find out whether members of Donald Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign colluded with Russia’s KGB and search the internet for confirmatory information, you’ll find quite a bit. Or if you’re inclined to believe that climate change is a hoax, a confirmatory search will turn up some evidence of that as well. *Some* evidence is out there in apparent support of even the most outlandish propositions. That’s why a balanced search for both confirmatory and disconfirmatory information is essential to sound judgment. But as we have seen, people often don’t recognize the need to seek out information from all sides of an issue, and doing so is made even harder by the fact that modern technologies create “information bubbles” where confirmatory information is shared by members of like-minded communities.

One study examined which sites people visited, “liked,” and forwarded on Facebook (Quattrociocchi, Scala, & Sunstein, 2016). The investigators examined the Facebook habits of two groups of users. One group included people whose likes were on posts that embraced various conspiracy theories (for example, that there is no link between HIV and AIDS, but powerful forces want people to believe there is) 95 percent of the time. In the other group, 95 percent of the users' likes were for posts that embraced scientific claims (for example, the discovery of gravitational waves). The investigators found that the more these Facebook users favored one type of post over the other, the more their *friends* tended to be highly polarized as well, and the more often these individuals responded to the occasional post that challenged their beliefs by finding (or revisiting) posts that reinforced their beliefs. To have an ideological position is to be surrounded, especially in today's world, by information that supports that position.

BOX 4.2

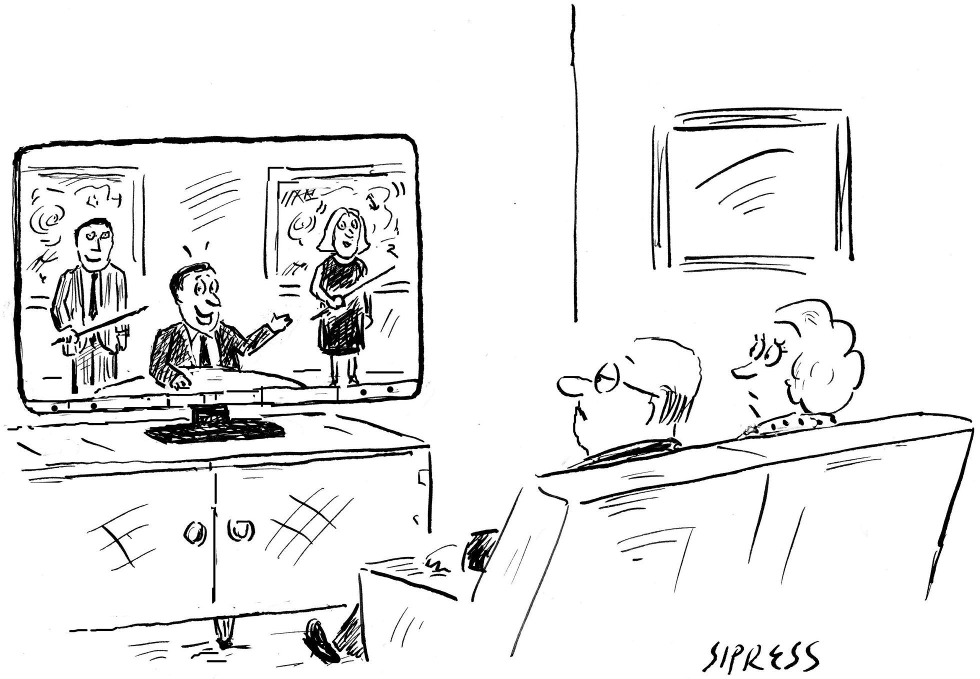
FOCUS ON NEWS, POLITICS, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Burst Your Bubble

Were you astonished when Donald Trump was voted out of office in 2020? Were you surprised when the Republican Party did not turn against him after his followers stormed the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021? If your answer to either of these questions is yes, you may be living in a news bubble not entirely of your own making. Once you click on a few news stories or editorials with a liberal or conservative bias, the internet will then supply you with large amounts of ideologically congruent news and opinion pieces. Thus, during the 2020 U.S. presidential campaign, supporters of Donald Trump received news that was mostly favorable to him and unfavorable to his opponent, Joe Biden, allowing many of them to believe that the depth of Trump’s public support was greater than it actually was. After January 6, Democrats, independents, and the more traditional wing of the Republican Party opposed to Trump kept receiving information in line with their views that the insurrection at the Capitol would spell the end of his political career.

When the only information we receive supports our preexisting viewpoints, we’re not getting the full picture about current events. And the more that people become trapped in news bubbles, the more intractable the nation’s political divisions become and the more confident people become that those on the other side are misguided and consuming fake and biased news (Westfall et al., 2015).

Fortunately, there are communications tools that can help burst your bubble. For example, the website AllSides presents “news from the left,” “news from the center,” and “news from the right” daily, and they will deliver to you, for free, news stories balanced in this way. Sites and apps like these can expose you to news and opinions that differ from your own views.



"That was Brad with the Democratic weather. Now here's Tammy with the Republican weather."

Motivated Confirmation Bias

People can fall prey to the confirmation bias even when they have no particular motivation to confirm a specific outcome. You may not care whether a given type of plant needs a lot of water, but if someone suggests that it does, you are likely to evaluate that suggestion by looking disproportionately at evidence that might confirm it.

But many times, of course, people are motivated to deliberately search for evidence that supports their preferences or expectations. Someone who wants a given proposition to be true may sift through the relevant evidence with special vigor to uncover information that confirms its accuracy. In such cases, information that supports what a person wants to be true is readily accepted, whereas information that contradicts what the person would like to believe is subjected to critical scrutiny and often discounted (Dawson, Gilovich, & Regan, 2002; Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Druckman & Bolsen, 2011; Gilovich, 1983, 1991; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Kunda, 1990; Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987; Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010).

In one notable examination of this type of motivated confirmation bias, proponents and opponents of capital punishment read about studies of the death penalty’s effectiveness as a deterrent to committing a crime (Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979). Some participants read state-by-state comparisons purportedly showing that crime rates are not any lower in states with the death penalty than they are in states without the death penalty, but they also read about how crime rates within a few states decreased as soon as the death penalty was put in place. Other participants read about studies showing the exact opposite: state-by-state comparisons that made the death penalty look effective and before-and-after comparisons that made it look ineffective. Those who favored the death penalty interpreted whichever set of evidence they were exposed to as strongly supporting their position. Those opposed to the death penalty thought that the evidence warranted the opposite conclusion. Both sides jumped on the problems associated with the studies that contradicted their positions, but they readily embraced the studies that supported them. Their preferences tainted how they viewed the pertinent evidence.

LOOKING BACK

Efforts to acquire needed information are often compromised by two pronounced types of confirmation bias. One type occurs when we look for evidence consistent with propositions or hypotheses we wish to evaluate. To evaluate a proposition satisfactorily, however, it’s necessary to examine evidence both for it and against it. The other type of confirmation bias occurs when we seek out and embrace evidence that confirms a proposition that we *want* to be true and explain away evidence that contradicts that proposition.

Glossary

confirmation bias	The tendency to test a proposition by searching for evidence in support of it.

Top-Down Processing: Using Schemas to Understand New Information

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe how schemas influence what we perceive and remember and how we think and act.
- Explain how particular schemas become activated and exert influence.

Understanding the world involves combining the information in front of you—whether it came to you passively or you actively sought it out—with what you already know (or think you know). Psychologists describe this as the simultaneous operation of bottom-up and top-down processing. Bottom-up processing takes in relevant stimuli from the outside world, such as text on a page, gestures in an interaction, or sounds at a cocktail party. At the same time, top-down processing filters and interprets bottom-up stimuli in light of preexisting knowledge and expectations. The meaning of stimuli is not passively recorded; it is actively *construed*.

Preexisting knowledge is necessary for understanding. What we know about human nature and about different social contexts allows us to determine, for example, whether another person’s tears are the product of joy or sadness. What we know about norms and customs enables us to decide whether a gesture is hostile or friendly. Our preexisting knowledge, furthermore, is not stored bit by bit. It is organized in coherent packages, or schemas, in which related information is stored together. For example, information about Joe Biden, 46th president of the United States, is tightly connected to information about Joe Biden, father of Beau and Hunter Biden; Joe Biden, vice president during the Obama Presidency; and Joe Biden, longtime senator from Delaware (Bartlett, 1932; Markus, 1977; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Schank & Abelson, 1977; E. R. Smith & Zárate, 1990). We have schemas for all sorts of things, such as a fast-food restaurant chain (so-so food, bright primary colors for decor, limited choices, cheap), a party animal (boisterous, drinks to excess, exuberant but clumsy dancer), and an action film (good guy establishes good guy credentials, bad guy gains the upper hand, good guy triumphs and bad guy perishes in eye-popping pyrotechnical finale).

The Influence of Schemas

Schemas affect our judgments in many ways: They direct our attention, structure our memories, and influence our interpretations (Brewer & Nakamura, 1984; Hastie, 1981; S. E. Taylor & Crocker, 1981). Without schemas, our lives would be a buzzing confusion. But schemas can also sometimes lead us to mischaracterize the world.

ATTENTION Attention is selective. We can’t focus on everything, and the knowledge we bring to a given situation enables us to direct our attention to what’s most important while largely ignoring everything else. The extent to which our schemas and expectations guide our attention was powerfully demonstrated by an experiment in which participants watched a video of two teams of three people, each passing a basketball back and forth (Simons & Chabris, 1999). Members of one team wore white shirts, and members of the other team wore black shirts. The researchers asked each participant to count the number of passes made between the members of one of the teams. Forty-five seconds into the action, a person wearing a gorilla costume strolled into the middle of the scene. Although a large gorilla might seem hard to miss, only half the participants noticed it! The participants' schemas about what is likely to happen in a game of catch directed their attention so intently to some parts of the video that they failed to see a dramatic stimulus they weren't expecting.

EXPECTATIONS GUIDE ATTENTION Because people don't expect to see a gorilla in the middle of a game of catch, only half the participants who watched this video saw it. Schemas can be so strong that they prevent us from seeing even very dramatic stimuli we don't expect to see.

MEMORY Because schemas influence attention, they also influence memory. We are most likely to remember stimuli that have captured our attention. Indeed, memory has been described as "attention in the past tense" (Goleman, 1985).

Researchers have documented the impact of schemas on memory in a great many experiments (S. T. Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Hastie, 1981; Hirt, 1990; Stangor & McMillan, 1992). In one early study, students watched a video of a husband and wife having dinner together (C. E. Cohen, 1981). Half of the students were told that the wife was a librarian, the other half that she was a waitress. The students later took a quiz that assessed their memory of what they had witnessed. The central question was whether their memories were influenced by their stereotypes (schemas about particular groups in society) of librarians and waitresses. The researchers asked them, for example, whether the woman was drinking wine (librarian stereotype) or beer (waitress stereotype) and whether she had received a history book (librarian) or romance novel (waitress) as a gift. The video had been constructed to contain an equal number of items consistent and inconsistent with each stereotype.

Did the participants' preexisting knowledge influence what they recalled? It did indeed. Students who thought the woman was a librarian recalled librarian-consistent information more accurately than librarian-inconsistent information, whereas those who thought she was a waitress did precisely the opposite. Information that fits a preexisting schema often enjoys an advantage in recall (Carli, 1999; Zadny & Gerard, 1974).

CONSTRUAL Schemas influence not only what information we focus on and remember but also how we interpret, or construe, that information (DeCoster & Claypool, 2004; Loersch & Payne, 2011). In the study described above, for example, participants likely made very different assumptions about how intently and carefully the woman was reading if they were told she was a librarian versus a waitress. To understand just how this works, meet Donald, a fictitious person who has been used as a stimulus in numerous experiments examining the effects of prior knowledge on social judgment:

> Donald spent a great amount of his time in search of what he liked to call excitement. He had already climbed Mt. McKinley, shot the Colorado rapids in a kayak, driven in a demolition derby, and piloted a jet-powered boat—without knowing very much about boats. He had risked injury, and even death, a number of times. Now he was in search of new excitement. He was thinking, perhaps, he would do some skydiving or maybe cross the Atlantic in a sailboat. By the way he acted one could readily guess that Donald was well aware of his ability to do many things well. Other than business engagements, Donald’s contacts with people were rather limited. He felt he didn’t really need to rely on anyone. Once Donald made up his mind to do something it was as good as done no matter how long it might take or how difficult the going might be. Only rarely did he change his mind even when it might well have been better if he had. (Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977, p. 145)

In one early study featuring Donald as the stimulus, students participated in what they thought were two unrelated experiments (Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977). In the first, they viewed a number of trait words projected on a screen as part of a perception experiment. Half the participants were shown the words *adventurous*, *self-confident*, *independent*, and *persistent* among a set of ten traits. The other half were shown the words *reckless*, *conceited*, *aloof*, and *stubborn*. After completing the ostensible perception experiment, the participants moved on to the second study on reading comprehension, in which they read the short paragraph about Donald and rated him on a number of trait scales. The investigators were interested in whether the words that participants encountered in the first experiment would lead them to apply different schemas and thus influence their evaluations of Donald.

As the investigators expected, participants who had been exposed to the words *adventurous*, *self-confident*, *independent*, and *persistent* formed more favorable impressions of Donald than did those who were shown the less flattering words. Thus, participants' schemas about personality traits like adventurousness and recklessness influenced the inferences they made about Donald.

ADVENTUROUS OR RECKLESS? Recent exposure to concepts like "self-confident" and "independent" makes people more likely to see this climber as "adventurous." Exposure to concepts like "conceited" and "stubborn" encourages seeing him as "reckless."

The broader point is that the information that is most accessible in memory can influence how we construe new information. This is most likely to occur when the stimulus, like many of Donald's actions, is ambiguous (Trope, 1986). In such cases, we must rely more heavily on top-down processes to compensate for the inadequacies of the information obtained from the bottom up.

BEHAVIOR

We’ve seen how schemas influence our attention, mem construal. Can they also influence behavior? Absolutely. Studies have shown that certain types of behavior are elicited automatically when people are exposed to stimuli in the immediate environment that bring to mind a particular action or schema (Loersch & Payne, 2011; Weingarten et al., 2016). Such exposure is called priming a concept or schema.

In one study, participants played a simplified game of blackjack. A computer dealt participants two cards, and they had to decide whether to bet that the sum of their two cards would exceed the sum of two cards that would soon appear for the “dealer” (the computer) or whether they wanted to pass and go to the next round. If they decided to bet, they won 5 points if their cards were higher than the dealer’s and lost 5 points if they were lower. During each trial, right before the participants made their decisions, a word was presented so quickly that participants weren’t aware of it. On some trials, the word was *gamble* or *wager*; on others, it was *fold* or *stay*. Even though the primes were presented too quickly for participants to consciously perceive them, participants were more likely to bet on trials preceded by the words *gamble* or *wager* than on trials preceded by the words *fold* or *stay* (Payne, Brown-Iannuzzi, & Loersch, 2016).

Other studies of this sort found that priming participants with dollar signs increased their betting on a laboratory slot machine (Gibson & Zielaskowski, 2013) and that priming them with words associated with achievement (*strive, succeed, compete)* led people to persevere longer at difficult tasks (Bargh et al., 2001; Weingarten et al., 2016). Moreover, playing German music in a liquor store appears to boost sales of German wine at the expense of French wine, whereas playing French music appears to boost sales of French wine—even if customers don’t realize what type of music is being played (North, Hargreaves, & McKendrick, 1999).

CONSCIOUSNESS OF ACTIVATION: NECESSARY OR NOT? Carefully conducted interviews with participants at the end of many priming experiments have found that few, if any, of them suspected that there was any connection between the two parts of the study—the initial priming phase and the subsequent judgment phase. This raises the question of how conscious a person must be of a stimulus for it to effectively prime a given schema. Research suggests a clear-cut answer: We don't need to be conscious of the stimulus at all. A great many studies have shown that subliminal stimuli—that is, stimuli presented outside of conscious awareness—can prime a schema sufficiently to influence subsequent information processing (Bargh, 1996; Debner & Jacoby, 1994; Devine, 1989b; Draine & Greenwald, 1998; M. J. Ferguson, 2008; M. J. Ferguson, Bargh, & Nayak, 2005; Greenwald, Klinger, & Liu, 1989; Klinger, Burton, & Pitts, 2000; L. Lepore & Brown, 1997; Welsh & Ordóñez, 2014).

Which Schemas Are Activated and Applied?

In the librarian/waitress study described earlier, there is little doubt about which schemas participants applied to the information in the video. The experimenter informed them that the woman was a librarian (or a waitress), and they viewed the video through the lens of their librarian (or waitress) schema. In real life, however, the situation is often more complicated. You might know that, besides being a librarian, the woman is a triathlete, a Republican, and a devotee of *The Great British Baking Show*. Which schema (or combination of schemas) is likely to be thought of, or activated?

RECENT ACTIVATION Schemas can be activated in various ways. Recency is one of the most common determinants of which schemas get activated. If a schema has been brought to mind recently, it tends to be more accessible and hence ready for use (T. E. Ford & Kruglanski, 1995; Herr, 1986; S. J. Sherman, Mackie, & Driscoll, 1990; Srull & Wyer, 1979, 1980; Todorov & Bargh, 2002).

In the “Donald” study described earlier, for example, recent exposure to trait adjectives such as *adventurous* or *reckless* influenced participants’ impressions of Donald (Higgins et al., 1977). By exposing participants to words implying adventurousness or recklessness, the researchers were trying to prime participants’ schemas for those traits. Of course, exposure to stimuli other than words can also activate schemas. Research has shown that people’s judgments and behavior can be influenced by schemas primed by features of the surrounding environment, such as the objects in a room or the color of the walls (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2003; Kay et al., 2004); cultural symbols, such as a country’s flag (T. Carter, Ferguson, & Hassin, 2011; Ehrlinger et al., 2011; Hassin et al., 2007); feedback from one’s own body, such as whether one happens to be nodding or shaking one’s head (Epley & Gilovich, 2001; Jostmann, Lakens, & Schubert, 2009; Priester, Cacioppo, & Petty, 1996); or even a passing smell (Holland, Hendriks, & Aarts, 2005).

THE INFLUENCE OF CHRONICALLY ACCESSIBLE SCHEMAS ON PERCEPTION AND JUDGMENT Certain schemas, such as “hipster” or “techie,” are used a lot and therefore are highly available and readily applied to new stimuli.

FREQUENT ACTIVATION AND CHRONIC ACCESSIBILITY You may have noticed that people differ in the schemas they tend to use when evaluating others. Employers at high-tech firms are often concerned with whether job candidates are smart, sales managers with whether employees are persuasive, and entertainment industry professionals with whether actors have charisma. As these examples illustrate, the role of the evaluator and the context in which a target person is encountered often influence which traits or schemas are used. But sometimes it’s simply a matter of habit. If a person uses a particular schema frequently, it may become chronically accessible and therefore likely to be used still more often in the future (Higgins, King, & Mavin, 1982). A frequently activated schema functions much like a recently activated one: Its heightened accessibility increases the likelihood that it will be applied to understanding a new stimulus.

EXPECTATIONS Sometimes people apply a schema because of a preexisting expectation about what they will encounter (Hirt, MacDonald, & Erikson, 1995; Sherman et al., 1990; Stangor & McMillan, 1992). The expectation activates the schema, and the schema is then readily applied. If the expectation is warranted, it saves considerable mental energy. For example, applying a “haggling” schema to a given commercial transaction allows us to dismiss the stated price without much thought or anxiety, and it frees us to make a counteroffer. Misapplying the haggling schema, however, can lead to the embarrassment of making a counteroffer when haggling is not appropriate. Expectations thus influence information processing by priming the schema, and the schema is readily applied at the slightest hint that it is applicable.

LOOKING BACK

Knowledge structures, or schemas, play a crucial role in judgment. Schemas influence judgment by guiding attention, influencing memory, and determining how information is construed. Schemas can also directly influence behavior. Schemas are particularly likely to exert an influence if they have been recently activated (and hence primed) or are habitually used, and we needn’t be aware of the recent or chronic activation of a schema for it to exert its effects. Schemas normally allow us to make judgments and to act quickly and accurately, but they can also mislead.

Glossary

bottom-up processing
“Data-driven” mental processing, in which an individual forms conclusions based on stimuli encountered in the environment.

top-down processing
“Theory-driven” mental processing, in which an individual filters and interprets new information in light of preexisting knowledge and expectations.

priming
The presentation of information designed to activate a concept and hence make it accessible. A prime is the stimulus presented to activate the concept in question.

subliminal
Below the threshold of conscious awareness.

Reason, Intuition, and Heuristics

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe some of the ways intuition and reason can combine to influence our judgments and decisions.
- Define the availability heuristic and explain how it can bias our judgments.
- Define the representativeness heuristic and explain how it can bias our judgments.

Suppose you are offered a chance to win $10 by picking, without looking, a red marble from a bowl containing a mixture of red and white marbles. You can make your selection from either of two bowls: a small bowl with 1 red marble and 9 white marbles or a large bowl with 9 red marbles and 91 white marbles. Which bowl would you choose?

> “I know too well the weakness and uncertainty of human reason to wonder at its different results.”
>
> —THOMAS JEFFERSON

If you’re like most people, you might experience some conflict here. The rational thing to do is to select the small bowl because it offers better odds: 10 percent versus 9 percent. But there are 9 potential winning marbles in the large bowl and only 1 in the other. The greater number of winning marbles gives many people a gut feeling that they should select from the large bowl regardless of the objective odds (**Figure 4.5**). Indeed, in one experiment, 61 percent of those who faced this decision chose the larger bowl, even though that bowl gave them lower odds of winning (Denes-Raj & Epstein, 1994).

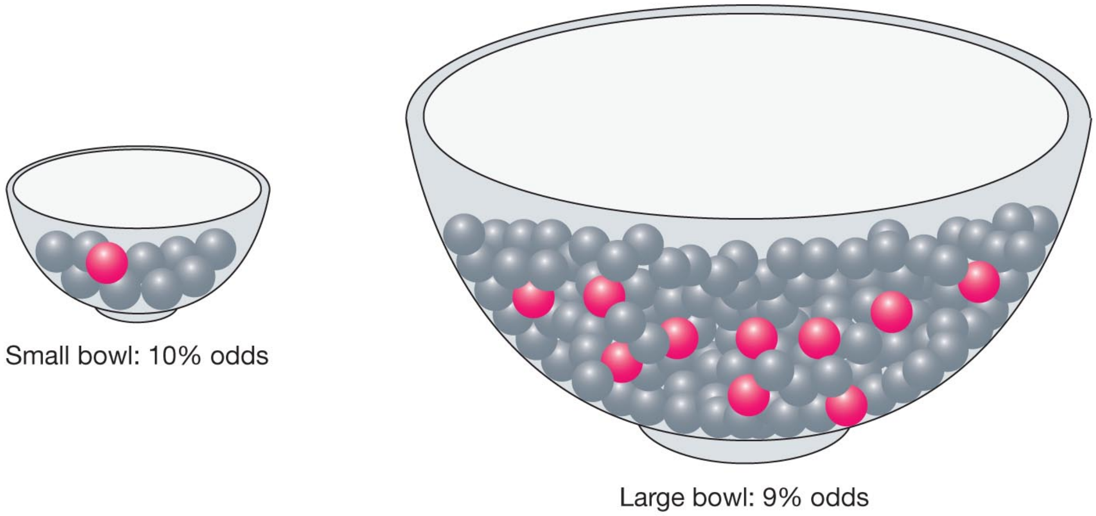


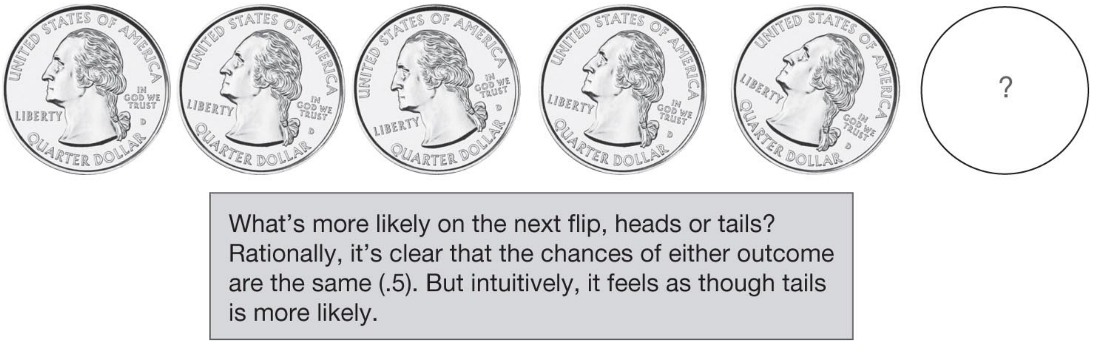
FIGURE 4.5 INTUITION AND REASON Even though a small bowl with just 1 red marble and 9 white ones provides a better chance of choosing a winning (red) marble, people often select the larger bowl with more red marbles and many more white marbles, knowing full well that they’re giving themselves lower odds of winning and thereby letting intuition override reason.

These results show that we’re often “of two minds” about certain problems. Indeed, a great deal of research suggests that our responses to stimuli are guided by two systems of thought that correspond to what are commonly referred to as intuition and reason (Epstein, 1991; Evans, 2007; Kahneman & Frederick, 2002; Sloman, 2002; Stanovich & West, 2002; Strack & Deutsch, 2004). The intuitive system operates quickly and automatically, is based on associations, and performs many of its operations simultaneously—*in parallel*. The rational system is slower and more controlled, is based on rules and deduction, and performs its operations one at a time—*serially*.

The rapid, parallel nature of the intuitive system means that it virtually always produces some output—an “answer” to the prevailing problem—and does so very quickly. That output is sometimes overridden by the slower, more deliberate rational system. For instance, if you had to predict the outcome of the next coin flip after witnessing five heads in a row, your intuitive system would quickly tell you that six heads in a row is rare and that you should therefore bet on tails. But then your rational system might remind you of a critical feature of coin flips that you may have learned in a statistics course: The outcomes of consecutive flips are independent of each other—the odds are always 50-50—so you should ignore what happened on the earlier flips (**Figure 4.6**).

Note that several things can happen with the output of these two systems: (a) The two systems can agree. For example, you might have a good feeling about one job candidate over another (the intuitive system), and that candidate’s qualifications might fit your rule to “always go with the person with a better track record” (the rational system). (b) As in the coin-flip example, the two systems can disagree, and the message from the rational system can override the message from the intuitive system. (c) Finally, the intuitive system can produce a response that “seems right” and can do so with such speed that the rational system is never engaged. In that case, you simply go with the flow—that is, with the quick output of the intuitive system.

Note the potential benefits of the two systems. Sometimes we have the luxury of acting rather mindlessly, relying on associations we have built up over time in familiar contexts. The intuitive system allows us to do that without using much mental energy. But other times, when the stakes are high or the context or problem is new, we need to be more careful and base our actions on more deliberate, more rational, and more effortful thought.



What’s more likely on the next flip, heads or tails? Rationally, it’s clear that the chances of either outcome are the same (.5). But intuitively, it feels as though tails is more likely.

FIGURE 4.6 **INTUITIVE PROCESSING AND MISTAKEN JUDGMENT** When watching a series of coin flips and seeing several heads in a row, nearly everyone has an intuitive feeling that the next flip is going to be tails. With the right education, however, that intuitive impulse is suppressed in light of the rational realization that the outcomes of coin flips are independent of one another, and the chances of heads on the next flip are the same as they always are: 50-50.

The rest of this chapter focuses on the interaction between these two systems, drawing from Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman’s work on the heuristics of judgment. Their work has had a great impact—not only in psychology but also in economics, management, law, medicine, political science, and statistics (Gilovich, Griffin, & Kahneman, 2002; Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Tversky and Kahneman have argued that the intuitive system automatically performs certain mental operations—assessments of how easily something comes to mind or of how similar two entities are—that powerfully influence judgment. They refer to these mental operations as heuristics: mental shortcuts that provide serviceable, if usually rather inexact, answers to common problems of judgment. They yield answers that feel right and therefore often forestall more effortful, rational deliberation.

Tversky and Kahneman have argued that although these heuristics generally serve us well, they sometimes produce mistaken judgments. Our intuitive system generates an assessment of some problem and suggests what may seem like a perfectly acceptable answer. But without a deeper, more considered analysis, we might ignore important considerations, and our judgments are consequently biased in predictable ways. Let’s examine how such biases can arise due to the operation of two extensively researched heuristics: the availability heuristic and the representativeness heuristic. We rely on the availability heuristic when we judge the frequency or probability of some event by how readily instances of that type of event come to mind. We use the representativeness heuristic when we try to categorize something by judging how similar it is to our conception of the typical member of the category.

The Availability Heuristic

Which Midwestern state has more tornadoes each year: Nebraska or Kansas? Even though they both average the same number, you, like most people, may have answered Kansas. If so, then you were guided by the availability heuristic. For most people, thinking about the frequency of tornadoes in Kansas immediately brings to mind the twister in the classic film *The Wizard of Oz*, and that easily retrieved instance has an outsized impact on our assessment of frequency.

(A)

(B)

THE AVAILABILITY HEURISTIC People often judge the likelihood of an event by how readily pertinent examples come to mind. (A) While tornadoes occur with equal frequency in both Nebraska and Kansas, people tend to think they are more common in Kansas because of their familiarity with (B) *The Wizard of Oz*, in which a tornado in Kansas whisks Dorothy and her dog Toto to the Land of Oz.

We can’t prevent ourselves from assessing the ease with which we can think of examples from Nebraska and Kansas, and once we’ve made such assessments, they seem to give us our answer. It’s easier to think of a tornado in Kansas (even though it’s a fictional one) than one in Nebraska, so we conclude that Kansas probably has more tornadoes. The implicit logic seems compelling: If examples can be quickly recalled, there must be many of them. Usually that’s true. It’s easier to think of male CEOs of *Fortune* 500 companies than female CEOs, esteemed Russian novelists than esteemed Norwegian novelists, and instances of German military aggression than Swiss military aggression—precisely because there are more male CEOs, more esteemed Russian novelists, and more instances of German military aggression. The availability heuristic, therefore, often serves us well. The ease with which relevant examples can be brought to mind—how available they are—is often an accurate guide to overall frequency or probability.

Often, but not always. Certain events may simply be more memorable or retrievable than others but not actually more frequent, making availability a poor indicator of true number or probability. Nebraska has as many tornadoes as Kansas does, but none has been as memorable as the one in *The Wizard of Oz*. In an early demonstration of the availability heuristic, Kahneman and Tversky (1973a) asked people whether there are more words that begin with the letter *r* or more words that have *r* as the third letter. A large majority thought that more words begin with *r*, but in fact more words have *r* in the third position. Because words are stored in memory in some rough alphabetical fashion, words that begin with *r* (*rain*, *rowdy*, *redemption*) are easier to recall than those with *r* as the third letter (*nerd*, *harpoon*, *barrister*). The latter words, although more plentiful, are harder to access.

BIASED ASSESSMENTS OF RISK One area where the availability heuristic can lead to trouble in everyday life involves assessments of the likelihood of different hazards. If people assess their risk by how easily they can bring to mind various hazards, they will be especially worried about those they hear a lot about in the media and not as worried about hazards that receive less attention, even if the latter are actually more dangerous (Slovic, Fischoff, & Lichtenstein, 1982).

OVERESTIMATING THE FREQUENCY OF DRAMATIC DEATHS People tend to overestimate the likelihood of dramatic causes of death that kill many people at once, such as fires. Because these catastrophes receive a great deal of coverage in the media, they come to mind easily when we consider the relative risk of different hazards.

For example, do more people die each year by homicide or by suicide? As you’ve surely noticed, homicides receive much more media coverage, so most people think they are more common. In reality, suicides outnumber homicides in the United States by a ratio of 3 to 2. Are people more likely to die by accident or from disease? Statistics indicate that diseases claim more than 16 times as many lives as accidents do, but because accidents (being more dramatic) receive disproportionate media attention, most people erroneously consider them responsible for about as many deaths as disease.

People typically overestimate the frequency of dramatic events that claim the lives of many people at once. Deaths due to plane crashes, earthquakes, and tornadoes are good examples. In contrast, people underestimate the commonness of silent individual deaths, such as those resulting from emphysema and stroke. **Table 4.1** lists the most overestimated and underestimated hazards.

TABLE 4.1 BIASED ASSESSMENTS OF PERCEIVED CAUSES OF DEATH

Most Overestimated	**Most Underestimated**
Motor vehicle accidents	Diabetes
Tornadoes	Lightning
Floods	Stroke
All cancers	Asthma

Fires	Emphysema
Homicides	Tuberculosis
Source: Adapted from Slovic, Fischoff, & Lichtenstein, 1982.	

Beyond causing people to miscalculate the risks posed by particular hazards, the availability heuristic, combined with a pronounced tendency for the media to report bad news over good, can lead people to believe that life in general is more dangerous than it actually is. You’ve no doubt noticed that print, broadcast, and online media tend to feature negative, violent, and sensational events. Bad news tends to be more newsworthy than good news—or, as the news world puts it, “If it bleeds, it leads.” Thus, in the world as the media present it, 80 percent of all crime is violent; in the real world, only 20 percent of reported crimes are violent (Center for Media and Public Affairs, 2000; Marsh, 1991; Sheley & Ashkins, 1981). Also, news coverage of crime doesn’t correlate with the rise and fall of the crime rate. There is just as much coverage during the best of times as there is during the worst of times (Garofalo, 1981; Windhauser, Seiter, & Winfree, 1990). People tend to get a similarly distorted picture of the world from social media, where negative information, particularly outrage, is more likely to be shared than positive information (Crockett, 2017; Schöne, Parkinson, & Goldenberg, 2021).

TV VIOLENCE AND BELIEF IN VICTIMIZATION Viewing crime shows such as *Chicago PD* makes people think the world is not a safe place. People who don't watch much TV feel the world is safer than people living in the same neighborhood who watch TV frequently.

This bad-news bias in the media can lead people to believe that they are more at risk of victimization than they really are. Investigators have conducted surveys that ask people how much television they watch and about their impressions of the prevalence of crime: "How likely do you think it is that you or one of your close friends will have their house broken into during the next year?" "If a child were to play alone in a park each day for a month, what do you think that child's chances would be of becoming the victim of a violent crime?"

Such studies have consistently found a positive correlation between the amount of time one spends watching TV and the belief that the world is a dangerous place—but in a nuanced fashion. Watching TV influences people's beliefs about how dangerous things are "out there" without affecting their beliefs about whether they themselves will be victimized (Tyler & Cook, 1984). Assessments of personal harm are driven much more by personal experience. As a result, a correlation between the amount of time spent watching TV and the fear of being personally harmed is only observed among people who live in high-crime neighborhoods (Doob & MacDonald, 1979; Gerbner et al., 1980). For these people, what they see on television resonates with what they witness in their own environment, making them more afraid than their neighbors who don’t watch much TV.

BIASED ESTIMATES OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO JOINT PROJECTS Our assessments of likelihood can be distorted not just by misleading information presented by others but also by information we encounter and process firsthand. Consider the dynamics of joint projects. People sometimes work together on a project and then afterward decide who gets the bulk of the credit. Suppose you work with a classmate on an assignment and turn in a single paper. Whose name is listed first? What if you and an acquaintance are hired to write a computer program for a lump-sum payment. How do you split the money?

Now that you know about the availability heuristic, you might expect that people would tend to overestimate their own contributions to such projects (J. Kruger & Savitsky, 2009; M. Ross & Sicoly, 1979; Savitsky, Adelman, & Kruger, 2012; Schroeder, Caruso, & Epley, 2016). After all, we devote a lot of energy and attention to our own contributions, so they should be more available than the contributions of everyone else. In one early test of this idea, married couples were asked to apportion responsibility for various tasks or outcomes in their daily life: how much each contributed to keeping the house clean, maintaining the social calendar, starting arguments, and so on (M. Ross & Sicoly, 1979). The respondents tended to give themselves more credit than their partners did. In most cases, when the estimates made by the two participants were summed, they exceeded the logically allowable maximum of 100 percent. (In our favorite example, a couple was asked to estimate their relative contributions to making breakfast. The wife said her share was 100 percent, on the reasonable grounds that she bought the food, prepared it, set the table, cleared the table, and washed the dishes. The husband estimated his contribution to be 25 percent—because he fed the cat!)

OVERESTIMATING CONTRIBUTIONS Because people’s own contributions are much more salient than those of their coworkers, they tend to overestimate how much of a contribution they have made to the group’s overall output. Most of these people are likely to think that they have done more during this neighborhood clean-up effort than their coworkers think they did.

How do we know it’s the availability heuristic rather than a motivational bias that gives rise to this phenomenon? In other words, maybe people overestimate their contributions simply because they want to see themselves, and have others see them, in the most favorable light. This would certainly be the logical conclusion if the effect held true only for positive items. But the investigators found that the overestimation of a person's own contributions held for both negative outcomes (such as starting arguments) and positive outcomes (such as taking care of the house), making it clear that availability plays a large role in this effect.

AVAILABILITY'S CLOSE COUSIN: FLUENCY Just as examples of some categories are easier to think of than others, some stimuli are easier to process than others. Psychologists use the term fluency to refer to the ease (or difficulty) associated with information processing. Clear images and common words are easy to process, or fluent. Blurred texts and unusual words (like *imbroglio*) are hard to process, or disfluent.

The subjective experience of fluency, much like the subjective sense of availability, influences all sorts of judgments people make (Jacoby & Dallas, 1981; Oppenheimer, 2008). For example, we judge fluent names to be more famous, fluent objects to be more prototypical members of their categories, and common adages that rhyme to be more valid and truthful than those that don't (Jacoby, Woloshyn, & Kelley, 1989; McGlone & Tofighbakhsh, 2000; Whittlesea & Leboe, 2000). "Woes unite foes" strikes people as more valid than the semantically equivalent "Woes unite enemies." Fluency also influences the perceived difficulty of a task that's being described. When the font (typeface) of a recipe is hard to read, people assume the dish would be hard to cook (Song & Schwarz, 2008).

In addition to such direct effects on judgment, fluency appears to influence *how* people process relevant information. A feeling of disfluency while processing information leads people to take something of a "slow down, be careful" approach to making judgments and decisions. Researchers have examined this tendency using the Cognitive Reflection Test (Frederick, 2005). In one study, the test was printed in either a normal, **highly readable font** or a degraded, *hard-to-*

read font. Performing well on the Cognitive Reflection Test requires stifling an immediate gut feeling to get the correct answer to each question. For example: “A bat and ball cost $1.10 in total. The bat costs $1 more than the ball. How much does the ball cost?” You need to think beyond the intuitive response of 10 cents to arrive at the correct response of 5 cents ($0.05 + $1.05 = $1.10). Participants gave more correct answers when the questions were presented in a degraded, and hence disfluent, font (Alter et al., 2007; Alter, Oppenheimer, & Epley, 2013). The difficulty of merely reading the question caused respondents to slow down, giving their more analytical processes a chance to catch up with their immediate intuitive responses.

The Representativeness Heuristic

We sometimes find ourselves wondering whether someone is a member of a particular category. Is he gay? Is she a Republican? In making such assessments, we automatically assess the extent to which the person in question *seems* gay or Republican. In so doing, we rely on what Kahneman and Tversky (1972) have dubbed the representativeness heuristic. Instead of focusing on the true question of interest— “How *likely* is it that this person is a Republican?” —we ask implicitly instead, “Is this person *similar* to my prototype of a Republican?” The use of the representativeness heuristic thus reflects an implicit assumption that a member of a given category ought to resemble the category prototype (that, say, Republicans are fiscally and socially conservative and have conventional tastes in films, music, and fashion).

The representativeness heuristic can be useful in making accurate judgments about people and events. Group members often resemble the group prototype (after all, the prototype must come from somewhere). The degree of resemblance between person and group can thus be a helpful guide to group membership. The strategy is effective to the extent that our prototype of the category is accurate and inasmuch as most members of the category resemble the prototype to at least some degree.

(A)

(B)

THE REPRESENTATIVENESS HEURISTIC (A) Images like this can give people a specific sense of what a representative Republican is like. (B) But many Republicans aren't at all like the stereotype, so we can be surprised when we learn that a person who doesn't fit the stereotype is a Republican.

BASE-RATE NEGLECT AND THE RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN MEMBERS AND CATEGORIES

Even when there is some truth to our prototypes, however, the representativeness heuristic can create difficulties if we rely on it exclusively. The problem is that a strong sense of resemblance can blind us to other potentially useful sources of information. One such source, known as base-rate information, concerns our knowledge of the relative frequency of the members of a given category. How many members of the category are there relative to the members of all other categories? The individual in question is more likely to be a Republican if the local population includes a lot of Republicans and few Democrats and independents. But a strong sense of representativeness sometimes leads us to ignore base-rate likelihood, which could (and should) be put to good use.

Many studies have documented this tendency to ignore or underutilize base-rate information when assessing whether someone belongs to a particular category (Ajzen, 1977; Bar-Hillel, 1980; Ginosar & Trope, 1980; Tversky & Kahneman, 1982). In one of the earliest studies, Kahneman and Tversky (1973b) asked participants to consider the following description of Tom W., supposedly written during Tom's senior year of high school by a psychologist who based his assessment on Tom's responses on personality tests. The participants were also told that Tom is now in graduate school.

> Tom W. is of high intelligence, although lacking in true creativity. He has a need for order and clarity and for neat and tidy systems in which every detail finds its appropriate place. His writing is rather dull and

> mechanical, occasionally enlivened by somewhat corny puns and by flashes of imagination of the sci-fi type. He has a strong drive for competence. He seems to have little feel and little sympathy for other people and does not enjoy interacting with others. Self-centered, he nonetheless has a deep moral sense. (Kahneman & Tversky, 1973b, p. 238)

One group of participants ranked nine academic disciplines (including computer science, law, and social work) in terms of the likelihood that Tom chose them as his field of specialization. A second group ranked the nine disciplines in terms of how similar they thought Tom was to the typical student in each discipline. A final group did not see the description of Tom; they merely estimated the percentage of all graduate students in the United States who were enrolled in each of the nine disciplines.

How should the participants assess the likelihood that Tom would choose each discipline for graduate study? They should certainly assess how similar Tom is to the type of person who pursues each field of study—that is, they should consider how representative Tom is of the people in each discipline. But representativeness is not a perfect guide. Some of the least lawyerly people study law, and some of the least people-oriented individuals pursue social work. Therefore, any additional useful information should also be considered, such as the proportion of all graduate students in each field (the base-rate information). Clearly, Tom is more likely to be in a field that has 1,000 students on campus than one that has 10. A savvy judgment, then, would combine representativeness with an assessment of the popularity of each field.

Table 4.2 lists the rankings of the nine disciplines by each of the three groups of participants—those assessing likelihood, similarity, and base rate. Notice that the rankings of the *likelihood* that Tom chose to study each of the disciplines are virtually identical to the rankings of Tom’s *similarity* to the students in each discipline. In other words, the participants’ responses were based entirely on how much the description of Tom resembled the typical student in each field. By basing their responses exclusively on representativeness, the participants failed to consider the other useful source of information: base-rate frequency. As you can also see from Table 4.2, the likelihood rankings didn’t correspond at all to what the participants knew about the overall popularity of each of the fields. Useful information was ignored.

TABLE 4.2 THE REPRESENTATIVENESS HEURISTIC

Participants ranked nine academic disciplines in terms of the likelihood that Tom W. chose that particular field, the perceived similarity between Tom W. and the typical student in that field, or the number of graduate students enrolled in that field.

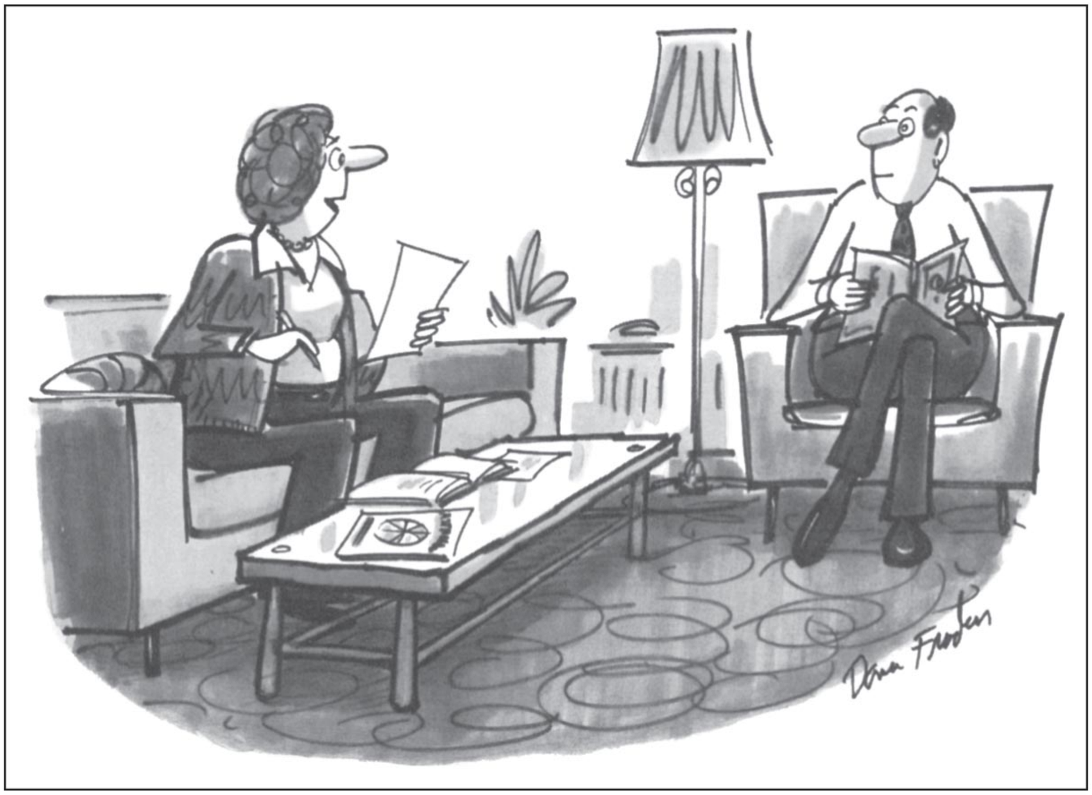
Discipline	**Likelihood**	**Similarity**	**Base Rate**
Business administration	3	3	3
Computer science	1	1	8
Engineering	2	2	5
Humanities and education	8	8	1
Law	6	6	6

Library science	5	4	9
Medicine	7	7	7
Physical and life sciences	4	5	4
Social science and social work	9	9	2
Source: Adapted from Kahneman & Tversky, 1973b.			

THE RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN CAUSE AND EFFECT The representativeness heuristic also affects people's assessments of causality (C. J. Downing, Sternberg, & Ross, 1985; Gilovich & Savitsky, 2002). Big effects are thought to have big causes, small effects to have small causes, complicated effects to have complicated causes, and so on. This assumption is often valid. Being hit with a small mallet typically produces a smaller bruise than being hit with a large mallet. Resolving the complicated problems in the Middle East will probably require complex, sustained negotiation, not some simple suggestion that has yet to be made. But sometimes small causes create big effects, and vice versa: Tiny viruses give rise to devastating diseases like AIDS and COVID; the $1 trillion the United States spent in Afghanistan was not enough to prevent the Taliban from taking over the country again.

Health and medicine are areas in which the representativeness heuristic's impact on judgments of cause and effect is particularly striking. Many people think you should avoid milk (or other dairy products) if you have a cold. Why? Because milk seems representative of phlegm. Many people think you should give up potato chips if you have acne: The greasiness of potato chips seems representative of the oily skin that often accompanies acne. For centuries, Western physicians believed that yellow vegetables were good for people with jaundice (which turns the skin yellow). To be sure, people are affected by what they eat—they gain weight by eating foods with lots of fat and develop an orange tint to the skin by consuming too much carotene.

Sometimes, however, we take this belief that “you are what you eat” to magical extremes. In one experiment, college students were asked to make inferences about the attributes of members of (hypothetical) tribes (Nemeroff & Rozin, 1989). One group read about a tribe that ate wild boar and hunted sea turtles for their shells, a second group read about a tribe that ate sea turtles and hunted wild boar for their tusks. The students’ responses indicated that they assumed the characteristics of the food would “rub off” on the tribe members. Members of the turtle-eating tribe were considered better swimmers; those who ate wild boar were thought to be more aggressive.



"For what it's worth, next week all your stars and planets will be in good aspect for you to launch an invasion of England."

Another area where representativeness affects causal judgments is the realm of pseudoscientific belief systems. Consider, for example, the case of astrological signs and representative personality traits. A central tenet of astrology is that an individual's personality is influenced by the astrological sign under which the person was born. And the personalities said to characterize individuals of a certain astrological sign tend to resemble the features we associate with that sign's namesake. For example, people whose astrological sign is Leo (the lion) are said to be proud, people whose astrological sign is Aries (the ram) are supposedly quick-tempered and headstrong, Virgos (the virgin) are modest and retiring, and so on. The personality profiles that accompany various astrological signs have been shown time and again to have absolutely no validity (Abell, 1981; Schick & Vaughn, 1995; Zusne & Jones, 1982). Why, then, is astrology so popular? Part of the reason is that astrology takes advantage of people’s use of the representativeness heuristic. Each of the personality profiles has some superficial appeal because each draws on the intuition that like goes with like. Who is more inclined to be vacillating than a Gemini (a twin)? Who is more likely to be fair and balanced than a Libra (the scales)?

The Joint Operation of Availability and Representativeness

The representativeness and availability heuristics sometimes operate in tandem. When two things seem to go together because one is representative of the other, instances when they actually do occur together are likely to be particularly memorable. The joint effect of representativeness and availability can thus create an illusory correlation between two variables, or the belief that they are correlated when in fact they are not. A judgment of representativeness leads us to expect an association between the two entities, and this expectation in turn makes us more likely to remember instances in which they are paired.

A classic set of experiments by Loren and Jean Chapman (1967) highlights how readily people form illusory correlations and how consequential they can be. The Chapmans were struck by a paradox observed in the practice of clinical psychology. Clinicians often claim that they find so-called projective personality tests helpful in making clinical diagnoses, but systematic research has shown most of these tests to be completely lacking in validity. Projective tests require people to respond to unstructured and ambiguous stimuli, such as the famous Rorschach inkblots, thus “projecting” their personalities onto what they see. Why would intelligent, conscientious, and well-trained clinicians believe that such tests can diagnose mental or emotional problems when they cannot? Why, in other words, do some clinicians perceive an illusory correlation between their clients' conditions and their clients' responses on such tests?

BOX 4.3

Not So Fast: **Critical Thinking About Representativeness and the Regression Effect**

To cut back on illegal driving practices (such as speeding, running red lights, and driving in bus lanes), local authorities in the United States and many other countries have been installing more and more safety cameras at especially hazardous locations. Some people have complained that these cameras just give municipalities a way to increase revenue from the fines they charge for violations. But others passionately maintain that these cameras have increased road safety. One group estimated that safety cameras in the United Kingdom save over 100 lives a year and result in over 4,000 fewer collisions (Gains et al., 2005).

Alas, the purported safety benefit is overstated. It fails to take into account a statistical phenomenon that plagues sound judgment in all walks of life: the regression effect. The regression effect is the statistical tendency, when any two variables are imperfectly correlated, for extreme values of one of them to be associated with less extreme values of the other. Tall parents tend to have tall kids, but not as tall as the parents themselves. Extremely attractive people tend to marry partners who are also attractive, but not as attractive as they are themselves. Students with the worst scores on the midterm tend to do badly on the final, but not as badly as they did initially.

What does this have to do with traffic safety? Cameras are installed where they are most needed—in locations where there have been a large number of recent collisions. Given that the number of accidents at one time is imperfectly correlated with the number of accidents afterward, locations where there were an unusually large number of accidents at one time are likely to have fewer accidents afterward, regardless of the presence of safety cameras. When the regression effect is taken into account, the best estimate is that safety cameras in the UK save 24 lives a year, not over 100. They work, in other words, but not as well as they *seem* to work.

People often fail to see the regression effect for what it is and instead conclude that they’ve discovered an important cause/effect relationship (like an exaggerated effect of safety cameras). Psychologists refer to this as the regression fallacy. If you’re a sports fan, for example, you’ve probably heard of the *Sports Illustrated* jinx. The idea is that appearing on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* is bad luck: It’s often followed by an unfortunate outcome, such as an injury, the end of a winning streak, or a loss in a key game or match. Of course it is! People appear on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* precisely when they’re at their peak, and so, on average, they will tend not to do as well in the near future. It’s pure statistical regression, not a jinx.

The lesson for research should be clear. We’re often most interested in helping people who are most in need, such as those whose arthritis has become unbearable, individuals whose depression has become so severe that they finally seek treatment, or students sent to the counselor’s office for classroom disruption. Because these people are at such a low point, they are likely to experience improvement whether or not their problems are addressed. That can make it tricky to assess the effectiveness of any treatment they receive. Among other things, the regression effect reinforces the importance of conducting research with a suitable control group: It allows researchers to determine whether the improvement seen in the treatment group is greater than that in the control group.

Why do people so often overlook the regression effect and commit the regression fallacy? One explanation is that regression runs counter to the representativeness heuristic. The most representative outcome for an athlete pictured on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* is success, not failure; the most representative outcome for someone who is extremely depressed is further sadness, not an uptick in mood. Because the mind makes predictions based on representativeness, we often find results that regress toward the mean surprising, and we invent explanations to make sense of the surprise.

To find out, the Chapmans first asked numerous clinicians which specific test responses tended to indicate the presence of which specific pathological conditions. Much of their work focused on the Draw-a-Person Test, in which the client draws a picture of a person and the therapist interprets the picture for signs of various psychopathologies. The clinicians reported that they observed many connections between particular drawings and specific conditions—drawings and pathologies that seem, intuitively, to belong together. People suffering from paranoia, for example, were thought to be inclined to draw unusually large or small eyes. People excessively insecure about their intelligence were thought to be likely to draw a large (or small) head.

ILLUSORY CORRELATION IN CLINICAL JUDGMENT Clinicians have been shown to “see” connections that research shows don’t really exist between various pathological conditions and responses to projective tests (for example, the Rorschach test shown here). These illusory correlations are often the product of the joint influence of availability and representativeness.

To investigate these illusory correlations further, the Chapmans gathered a sample of 45 Draw-a-Person pictures: 35 drawn by patients with psychosis in a nearby hospital and 10 drawn by graduate students in clinical psychology. They then attached a phony statement to each picture that supposedly described the condition of the person who drew it. Some came with the description “is suspicious of other people,” others with the description “has had problems of sexual impotence,” and so on. The researchers were careful to avoid any correlation between the nature of the drawings and the condition attached to each one. For example, “is suspicious of other people” appeared just as often on pictures with average eyes as on pictures with large or small eyes.

These pictures (with accompanying pathologies) were then shown to college students who had never heard of the Draw-a-Person Test. Although the study was carefully designed so there was no connection between the pictures and specific conditions, the students nonetheless “saw” the same relationships reported earlier by the clinical psychologists. To the students, too, it seemed that prominent eyes were likely to have been drawn by individuals who were suspicious of others. This finding suggests, of course, that the clinical psychologists were not detecting any real correlations between pathological conditions and responses on the Draw-a-Person Test. Instead, they were “detecting” the same nonexistent associations that the undergraduate students were seeing—illusory correlations produced by the availability and representativeness heuristics working together. Certain pictures seem representative of specific pathologies (for example, prominent eyes and being suspicious of other people), and therefore instances in which the two are observed together (a suspicious individual drawing a person with large eyes) are particularly noteworthy and memorable.

The Chapmans’ findings exemplify a very broad point about human judgment: When associations or propositions seem plausible, people often believe them—regardless of the evidence.

LOOKING BACK

Two mental systems guide our judgments and decisions: one akin to intuition and the other akin to reason. The intuitive system operates quickly and automatically, while the rational system is more deliberate and controlled. These systems can lead to the same judgments or to opposite judgments—or the intuitive system may produce a satisfying judgment so quickly that the rational system is never engaged. The quick assessments made by the intuitive system are often based on heuristics, which can sometimes bias judgment. The availability heuristic may lead to biased assessments of risk and biased estimates of people’s contributions to joint projects. The representativeness heuristic may result in neglecting base-rate information and lead to mistaken assessments of cause and effect. When these two heuristics operate together, they can lead to an illusory correlation between two variables.

Glossary

heuristics
    Intuitive mental operations, performed quickly and automatically, that provide efficient answers to common problems of judgment.

availability heuristic
    The process whereby judgments of frequency or probability are based on how readily pertinent instances come to mind.

representativeness heuristic
    The process whereby judgments of likelihood are based on assessments of similarity between individuals and group prototypes or between cause and effect.

fluency
    The feeling of ease (or difficulty) associated with processing information.

base-rate information

Information about the relative frequency of events or members of different categories in a population.

illusory correlation

The belief that two variables are correlated when in fact they are not.

regression effect

The statistical tendency, when two variables are imperfectly correlated, for extreme values of one of them to be associated with less extreme values of the other.

regression fallacy

The failure to recognize the influence of the regression effect and to instead offer a causal theory for what is really a simple statistical regularity.

Chapter Review

SUMMARY

Snap Judgments: Inferring Personality From Physical Appearance

- Sometimes people make judgments on the basis of very little information, such as making personality judgments based on physical appearance.
- People often agree with one another in their snap judgments, but evidence that those agreed-upon judgments are accurate is harder to come by.

Inferring the Causes of Behavior

- We often rely on the *covariation principle* when making causal attributions. When a person often engages in a particular behavior whereas few others do, we tend to attribute the behavior to the person. When a person behaves in a similar fashion in many different circumstances, we similarly tend to attribute the behavior to the person.
- *Counterfactual thoughts* can affect attribution. If people can readily generate alternative outcomes of an event (“if only”), joy or pain is amplified.
- People often commit the *fundamental attribution error*, attributing behavior to personal characteristics while ignoring situational factors that may have been more important.
- There are often differences in the causal attributions of actors and observers: Actors are more likely than

observers to attribute their own behavior to their situations, and observers are more likely than actors to attribute the same behavior to traits or other properties of the actor.
- People in interdependent cultures are more likely to attribute an actor’s behavior to the situation than are people in independent cultures.

How Information Is Presented

- The way information is presented, such as the order of presentation, can affect judgment. A *primacy effect* arises when the information presented first is more influential because it affects the interpretation of subsequent information. A *recency effect* arises when information presented last is more influential, often because it is more available in memory.
- Order effects are a type of *framing effect*. Other framing effects involve a change in the language or structure of the information presented to create a desired effect.
- The temporal framing of an event can also influence how it is interpreted. Far-off events are construed in more abstract terms, whereas imminent events are construed more concretely.

How We Seek Information

- People tend to examine whether certain propositions are true by searching for information consistent with the proposition in question. This *confirmation bias* can lead people to believe things that aren’t true because some evidence can generally be found to support even the most questionable propositions.
- People are sometimes motivated to find evidence in favor of a desired conclusion, so they focus only on collecting supporting evidence. This strategy leads them to believe

that their preferred conclusion is more valid than it really is.

Top-Down Processing: Using Schemas to Understand New Information

- Schemas influence the interpretation of information. They are important *top-down* tools for understanding the world, as opposed to the *bottom-up* processing of information from the outside world.
- Schemas guide attention, memory, and the construal of information, and they can directly prompt behavior.
- Being exposed to certain stimuli (such as a plastic pail and shovel) often has the effect of *priming* the concepts with which they’re associated (the beach), making those concepts momentarily more accessible.
- In general, the more recently and the more frequently a schema has been activated, the more likely it is to be applied to new information. Conscious awareness of a schema is not required for it to have an influence.

Reason, Intuition, and Heuristics

- People have two systems for processing information: an intuitive system and a rational system. Intuitive responses are based on rapid, associative processes, whereas rational responses are based on slower, rule-based reasoning.
- *Heuristics* are mental shortcuts that provide people with sound judgments most of the time, although they sometimes lead to errors in judgment.
- People use the *availability heuristic* when judging the frequency or probability of some event by how readily relevant instances come to mind. It can cause people to overestimate their own contributions to group projects,

and it can lead to faulty assessments of the risks posed by memorable hazards.
- The sense of *fluency* people experience when processing information can influence the judgments they make about it. Disfluent stimuli lead to more reflective thought.
- People use the *representativeness heuristic* when trying to categorize something by judging how similar it is to their conception of the typical member of a category or when trying to make causal attributions by assessing how similar an effect is to a possible cause. Sometimes this tendency leads people to overlook highly relevant considerations, such as *base-rate information*—how many members of the category there are in a population.
- Operating together, availability and representativeness can produce potent *illusory correlations*, or thinking that two variables are correlated, both because they resemble each other and because the simultaneous occurrence of two similar events stands out more than that of two dissimilar events.
- People often fail to take into account the *regression effect*, whereby extreme values on one variable tend to be followed by less extreme values on another variable, and believe they have discovered a causal relationship where none truly exists.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. How valid are snap judgments? Do brief exposures to a person’s physical appearance or to “thin slices” of the individual’s behavior provide meaningful information about what that person is really like? What are possible consequences of snap judgments?
2. If you were developing an advertising campaign for a fitness class, what kinds of framing strategies might you use to increase the chances of people signing up for the

class? In particular, consider spin framing, positive and negative framing, and temporal framing.

3. Suppose you're about to go on a blind date when a mutual friend warns you that your date can be a little cold and unfriendly. According to research on the confirmation bias, how might this information influence the impression you ultimately form about your date?
4. Research on priming suggests that it is possible for a stimulus to activate a schema even if a person is not consciously aware of the stimulus. Can you think of ways that you might be able to use priming to influence others' behavior?
5. Can you think of a time when you committed the fundamental attribution error? What happened? Why do you think you made this mistake?
6. Imagine you are single and decide to go to a speed-dating event during which you will have a series of 5-minute dates with many people. You really care about getting to know what your dates are like. Given this situation, which types of behaviors would strongly signal the type of person each date is? What types of behaviors might you discount—that is, chalk up to the demands of the speed-dating situation?
7. In what ways do the stories that are reported most frequently affect people's judgments about various risks they face in the world?
8. Imagine that your friends are working together on a task. You asked each person to report what percentage of the work they were responsible for and then add up the individual percentages. Would you expect the percentages to add to roughly 100 percent? Why or why not?

The answer guidelines for the Think About It questions can be found at the back of the book . . .

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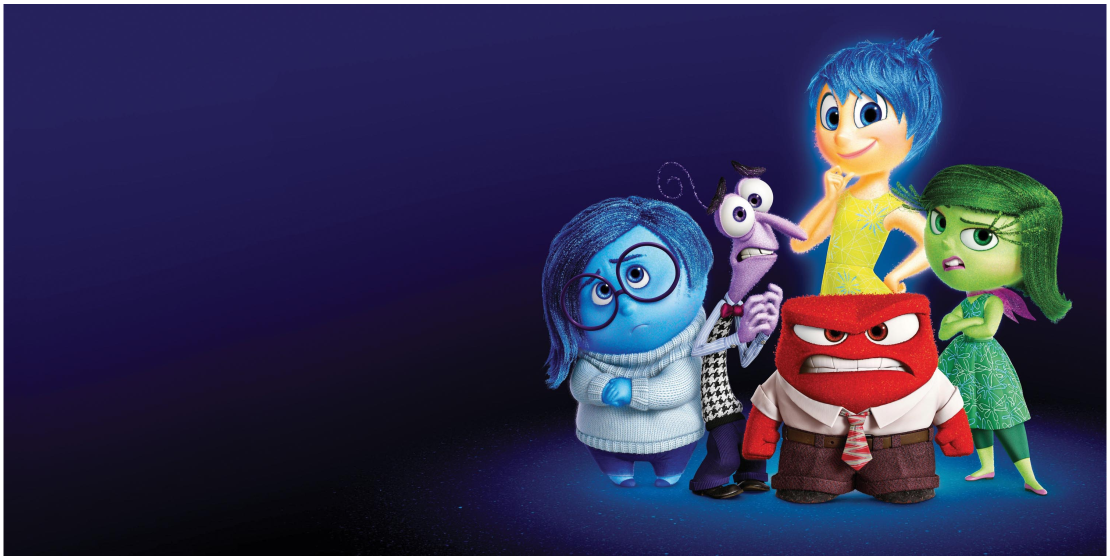
CHAPTER
5

Emotion and Well-Being

What explains the enduring popularity of risky sports like skateboarding in America?

How do emotions enable us to form meaningful relationships?



How might our emotions guide our perceptions of the world?

OUTLINE

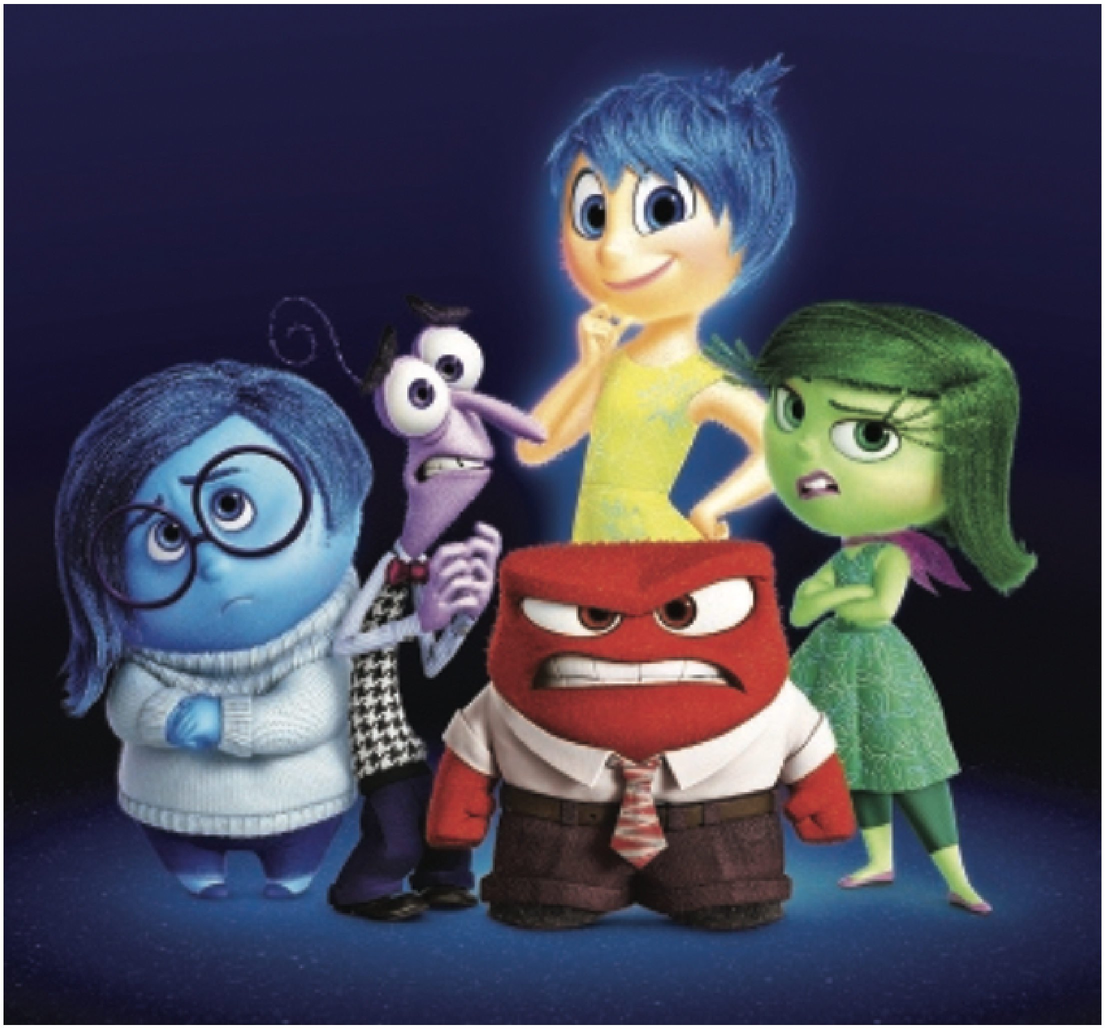
- Defining Emotion
- Emotional Expression: Both Universal and Culturally Specific
- Emotions and Social Relationships
- Emotions and Understanding the Social World
- Happiness

A decade ago, Pixar was searching for a subject for its next film. What captured the creative team’s imagination was something very close to many of their lives as parents: the emotions young people feel as they transition to adolescence. Adolescence is a notoriously emotional time, when the easy delights of childhood are replaced by the anxieties and pressures that come with the social and sexual dynamics of the teenage years. An idea began to take hold at Pixar: The subject of its next film would be emotions themselves, portrayed as characters in a movie.

To better understand this new subject, a small team of filmmakers immersed themselves in the science of emotion you are about to study. Intrigued by the dramatic possibilities of portraying how emotions work in the human mind, they asked such questions as: How do emotions shape how we perceive the world? How do they guide our actions, for better and for worse? The science of emotion became the bedrock of Pixar’s film *Inside Out*.

Inside Out is about the emotional turmoil that 11-year-old Riley experiences as she moves from Minnesota to San Francisco. It is a disruptive move, one that requires Riley to leave behind her best friend, idyllic moments of ice-skating with her parents, and the passion of her childhood—her hockey team. Along with human characters you would typically find in a movie, *Inside Out*’s plot is also driven by the characters inside Riley’s mind—her emotions. There are five, to be precise: anger, disgust, fear, joy, and sadness.

Inside Out dramatizes two central insights about emotion. The first is that emotions guide how we construe the social world—the “Inside” of *Inside Out*. The five emotions depicted in the film vie for control over a console in Riley’s mind, and once in charge, if only for a second or two, they guide how Riley construes her present circumstances. For example, in one scene, when Riley’s dad offers to walk to school with her on the first day, the voice of disgust rises to convey how mortifying it would be to be seen with her dad. These emotions also guide how Riley thinks about the past. In one of the more poignant scenes in the film, Riley’s current sadness adds a blue tint to her joyous, yellow-hued memories of her friendships and favorite pastimes from her childhood in Minnesota.



INSIDE OUT Pixar drew upon the science of emotion in making the hit movie *Inside Out*.

A careful viewing of *Inside Out* uncovers a second overarching idea about emotion: Emotions guide our behavior in immediate and powerful ways—the “Out” of *Inside Out*. Anger drives Riley’s behavior when she competes fiercely on the ice rink or storms upstairs during a fight with her parents. Even sadness prompts thoughtful and wise action, guiding Riley to comfort her imaginary friend when he loses the wagon they had played in during Riley’s childhood. If you watch the film carefully, you will see how fleeting emotional shifts in Riley’s mind quickly lead to behaviors that fit the present context. Emotions give rise to action.

Inside Out' s artistic portrayal of the science of emotion counters traditional ideas of emotions as enemies of rationality and disrupters of cooperative social relations. Rather, emotions guide how we perceive and act in the world around us, sometimes in ways that lead to trouble, but more often in ways that enable us to get along well in the world.

> "We all know that emotions are useless and bad for our peace of mind and our blood pressure."
>
> —B. F. SKINNER

This chapter explores the science that informed *Inside Out*. In our exploration, we will seek answers to several enduring questions: In what ways are emotions universal, and in what ways do they vary across cultures? What roles do emotions play in social relationships? How do emotions influence reasoning? And finally, what is happiness, and what are some of the surest ways to achieve it? Before tackling these questions, we first attempt to define emotion—not a simple task. ■

Defining Emotion

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Distinguish among emotions, moods, and emotional disorders.
- Identify the purposes emotions serve in our daily lives.

Light is something everybody can see, but it is hard to define. The same is true of emotions. When you experience cold feet before giving a presentation, what is that experience of fear like? When you are awestruck by coastal redwoods over 350 feet tall, what makes up those feelings of wonder and astonishment? What happens when a friend’s kindness moves you to tears? What are emotions, and, critically, how do they differ from other kinds of feeling states, such as moods and more general feelings of, say, well-being or despair?

Emotions are brief responses to challenges or opportunities that we appraise as important to our goals; they manifest in patterns of experience, expression, and physiology (Scherer, 2005). In keeping with a central theme of this book, emotions arise because of construals, or what are called appraisals: interpretations of events in terms of things like how pleasant, novel, fair, or threatening the event is and whether you, other people, or situational factors caused the event in the first place (Moors et al., 2013). How you construe your present environment, then, matters a great deal for the emotions you are likely to feel.

BOX 5.1

Not So Fast: **Critical Thinking About People’s Reports onthe Causes of Emotions**

Emotions often drive a search for understanding, explanation, and meaning. We feel ourselves falling in love and in our euphoria seek an explanation for why. We feel anger at work and try to put together a story that accounts for our strong feelings. In therapy, which over 60 million Americans have tried, people often construct narratives that explain the deep causes of their current emotional struggles.

Soliciting narratives from people of their understanding of the causes of their emotions is a widely used method in the science of emotion. In these studies, participants are asked to think about a past emotional experience and explain why it happened. This research has helped emotion scientists pinpoint specific construals that give rise to different, but closely related, emotions. For example, the experience of guilt centers around harm done to another person, whereas the experience of shame results from the sense that we have failed to live up to expectations about who we should be (Tangney et al., 1996). People report that other people’s unfair actions are a chief cause of anger, while broad circumstantial factors, like fate, disease, or economic conditions, tend to cause sadness (C. A. Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). But do the stories we tell about the causes of our emotions correspond to their actual causes?

To be sure, when you ask someone to give a causal account of an emotional experience, the person's narrative will get a lot right. When someone tells you why they felt awe when sitting on the rim of the Grand Canyon, their vivid description of the sights, smells, and sounds of the canyon likely correspond to the actual causes of the experience of awe. Nevertheless, there is good reason to suspect that people's verbal accounts will miss important influences on their emotional experience (Parkinson & Manstead, 1992). For example, our narrative accounts of emotion rarely refer to certain contextual factors that are known to influence people's emotions, such as the time of day, the day of the week, the level of air pollution, the sight of nearby green spaces, the presence of people of high or low status, and regional levels of income inequality (for example, D. S. Moskowitz, 2010; Oishi, 2014; Rusting & Larsen, 1998; Sugiyama et al., 2008). You wouldn't tell a friend that you are angry because it's 11 a.m. on Tuesday or because the smog index is high; such explanations don't fit our cultural theories of emotion. Nor would you say that you fell in love with your boyfriend because he lived near you, you often bumped into him in the hallway, and he enjoys high status among your peers (all documented causes of attraction, as you will learn in Chapter 10). Were you to explain your love for your boyfriend in this fashion, you'd not only offend him, but you'd likely also be seen by others as strange or cold. The more general lesson is that a variety of complex processes, many of them automatic, give rise to emotional experience. The verbal accounts we offer for why we feel the way we do articulate only some of those processes. Therefore, self-reports like those solicited in narrative recall studies can't always be trusted.

People are quite accurate when reporting what they are feeling, but their accounts of why they feel that way should be treated with some skepticism.

NARRATIVES AND EMOTION UNDERSTANDING Research finds that people become attracted to other individuals in highly arousing situations, such as walking across this suspension bridge. Yet it is very unlikely that they would explain such feelings of warmth in terms of being aroused on a harrowing suspension bridge.

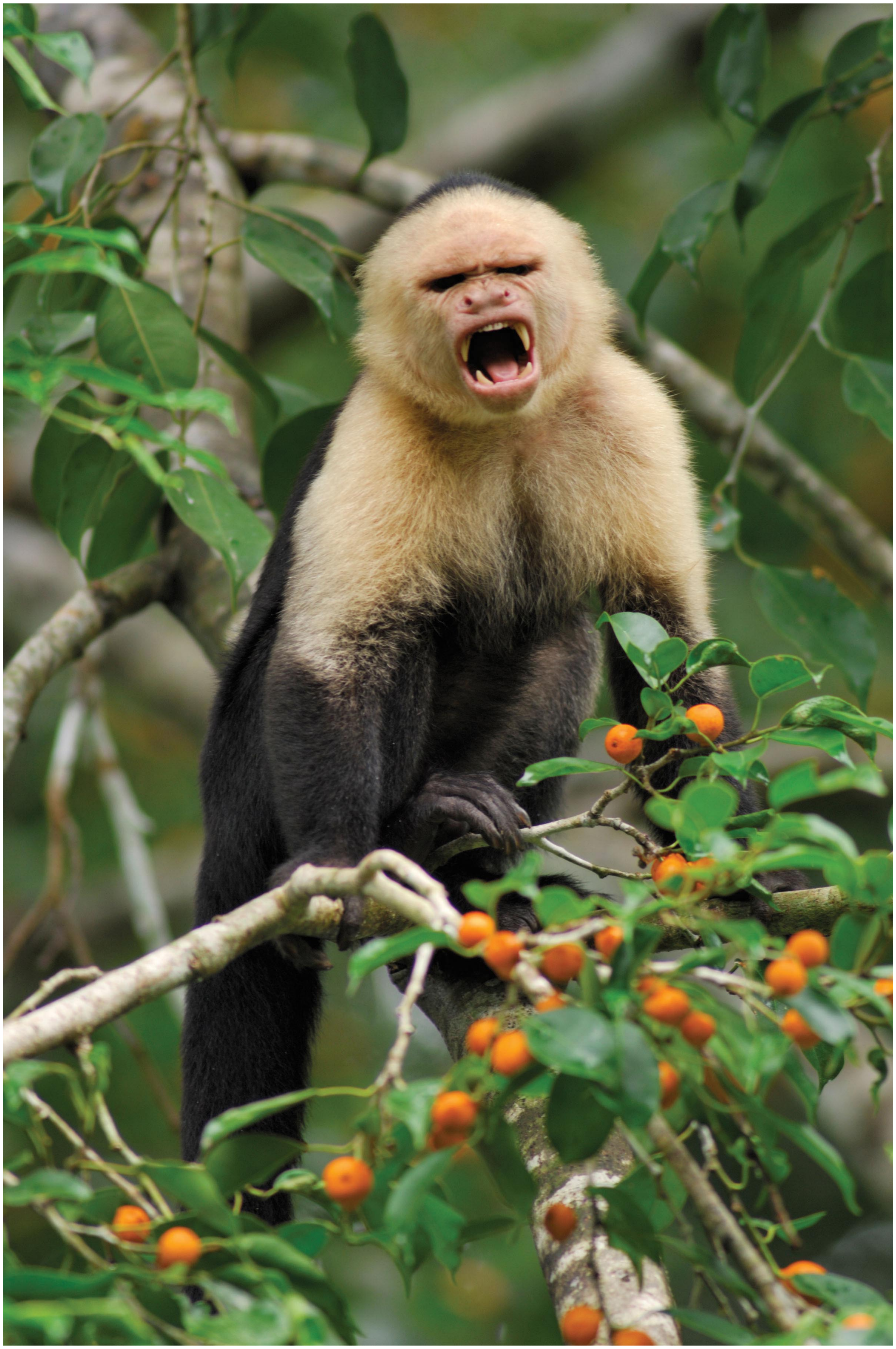
Emotions also involve shifts in our physiology. This was of particular interest to William James, a founding figure in psychology, who suggested that all emotions, from fear to love to bliss, have accompanying bodily responses, such as changes to your heart rate, sweaty palms, the blush, and the chills (Kreibig, 2010). Emotions also involve patterns of expressive behavior—that is, ways in which we express emotions like anger, desire, or triumph with vocalizations, facial expressions, and movements of our arms, head, and torso (Cordaro et al., 2018).

How might we differentiate emotions from other subjective states like moods? First, emotions are brief, lasting only for seconds or minutes (Ekman, 1992). In contrast, moods, such as feeling irritable or blue, can last for hours and even days. Emotional disorders, including depression and generalized anxiety, last for weeks, months, or years.

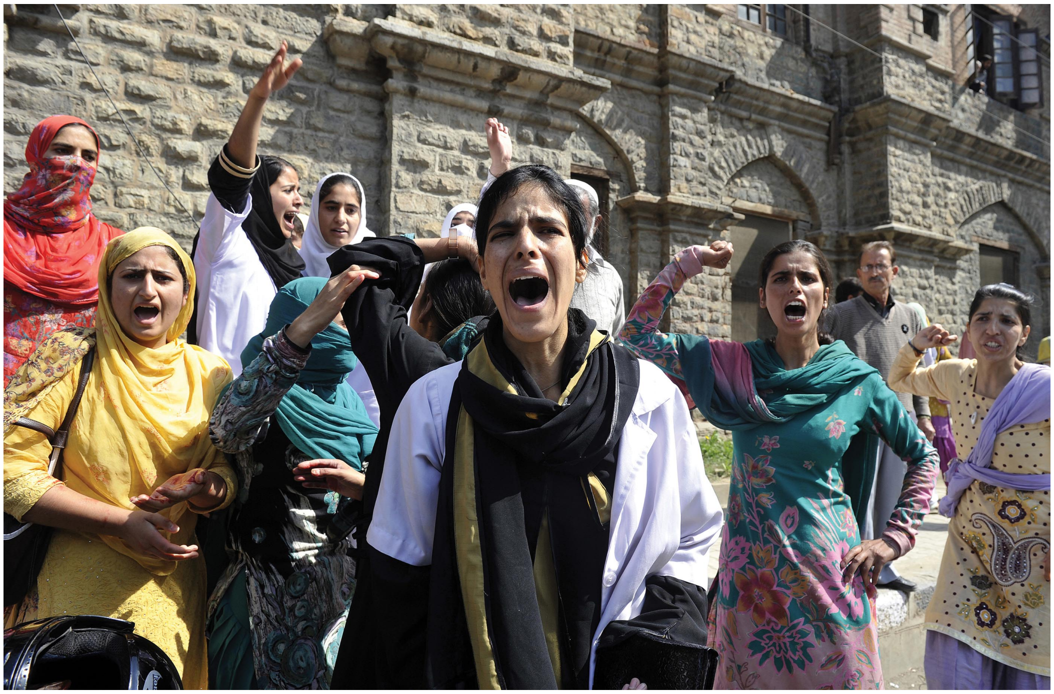
Emotions are also specific. Emotions arise in response to specific events, typically involving people in our immediate social environment—the racist in a YouTube video whose hate speech infuriates you, the coworker whose assistance fills you with gratitude, the ill relative whose demise saddens you. Philosophers call the focus of an emotional experience its *intentional object*. When you’re angry, you usually have a very clear sense of what you’re angry about (say, a sexist remark by a professor). By contrast, other feeling states, such as moods and disorders, are more general and unfocused, and it isn’t always clear what they’re about.

Why do we have emotions? How do brief, specific experiences of, say, amusement, sadness, love, or embarrassment help us in our daily lives? One answer is that they help us interpret our surrounding circumstances (Oatley, 2004). Any situation can be construed in multiple ways and, as a consequence, lead us to act in different ways. When at a party, you might attend to a new acquaintance’s awkward attempts to mix with the crowd of strangers, a narcissist bragging about his latest accomplishments, or signs of tension between two friends. Emotions prioritize which events you attend to in the environment, influence how much weight you assign them, determine how you reason about them, and even affect whether you deem them right or wrong.

A second purpose emotions serve is to guide our actions (Frijda, 1986). Without emotions, we would be lost in thought. When you see a friend suffering, it is your feelings of sympathy that spur altruistic action (Eisenberg et al., 1989). Feelings of awe lead to sacrifices of different kinds, such as beginning to consume less (Zhao et al., 2018). Even an emotion like anger, which might appear to produce maladaptive outbursts and temper tantrums, perhaps more typically produces actions that remedy injustice. For example, in studies of protesters who demonstrate against racism, low wages, unemployment, discrimination, and police brutality, it is the experience of anger that consistently predicts whether an individual will join a march or sign a petition (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). Anger even appears to drive protests against injustice in nonhuman primates. In one study, pairs of capuchin monkeys sat next to each other and traded tokens with an experimenter in exchange for food (Brosnan & de Waal, 2003). When two monkeys paired together both received cucumbers from the experimenter, they each performed the task calmly and contentedly. But in situations when one of the pair received a more desirable grape, nearly half the monkeys who still received only the bland cucumbers refused to exchange tokens for food, and many threw their cucumbers in angry protest. In this way, emotions, even anger, motivate specific actions that advance our goals.



(A)


(B)

EMOTIONS AND ACTIONS (A) This angry-looking monkey shows a classic threat display, signaling aggressive intentions. (B) This demonstrator shows a similar pattern of expressive behavior, signaling anger at the injustice she is protesting.

> “How much more grievous are the consequences of anger than the causes of it.”
>
> —MARCUS AURELIUS, *MEDITATIONS*

For over 2,000 years, philosophers and other observers of the human condition have seen emotions as enemies of reason and the source of maladaptive social behavior (Oatley, 2004). But more recent scientific findings lead to a different view. Brief, fleeting experiences of emotion enable us to respond effectively to the specific challenges and opportunities we face, especially those involving other people (van Kleef, de Dreu, & Manstead, 2010). Gratitude motivates us to reward others for their generosity. Guilt prompts us to make amends when we have harmed someone. Anger impels us to right social wrongs and restore justice. Awe leads us to connect to things larger than ourselves, such as humanity at large, the natural environment, even the cosmos. Of course, not every episode of emotion has positive results. Outbursts of anger, for example, can end friendships, lead to flaming online, and even start wars. But in general, emotions motivate and guide appropriate goal-directed behavior that supports stronger and smoother social relationships.

> “There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.”
>
> —WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *HAMLET*

LOOKING BACK

Emotions are brief, specific, subjective experiences that help people meet their (often social) goals, and they involve specific appraisals, experiences, expressions, and physiological responses. Emotions guide our construal of social contexts and our behavior, enabling us to respond to the threats and opportunities we perceive in the environment.

Glossary

emotion
: A brief, specific response, involving appraisals, experiences, expressions, and physiology, that helps people meet goals, including social goals.

appraisal
: The interpretation an individual gives to a situation that gives rise to the experience of the emotion.

Emotional Expression: Both Universal and Culturally Specific

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe Charles Darwin’ s approach to emotional expression.
- Explain how emotional expression is similar across cultures.
- Explain how cultural values influence which emotions are focal.

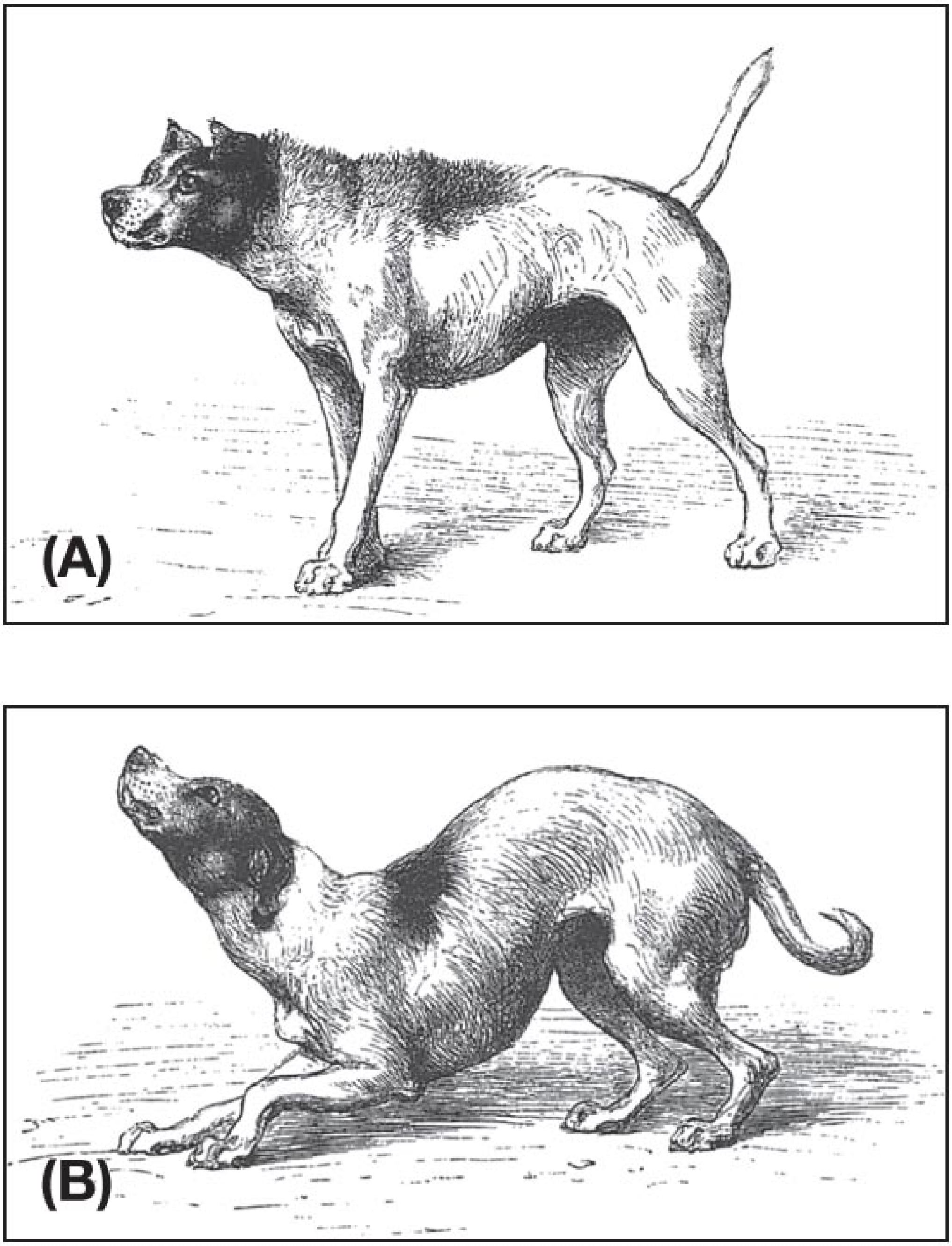
Having outlined what emotions are, we now discuss a fundamental tension in the field between evolutionary and constructivist approaches. An evolutionary approach portrays emotions as adaptive reactions to survival-related threats and opportunities that involve specific patterns of expression and physiology (Ekman, 1992; Keltner et al., 2022; Nesse, 1990; Tooby & Cosmides, 1992; Tracy, 2014). Thus, we might expect emotions to be universal—that is, you would likely observe similar emotional responses in people in similar contexts across different cultures.

In contrast, a constructivist approach proposes that culture affects how we feel about events, what we might do about our feelings, and how we express and describe our feelings to others and to ourselves. Within this perspective, emotions derive from language and knowledge structures of culture, which we learn as we develop from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. Emotions are also strongly influenced by the values, roles, institutions, and socialization practices that vary across cultures and shape how we construe social events (Barrett, 2017; Mesquita, de Leersnyder, & Boiger, 2016; Oatley, 1993; J. A. Russell, 2003). As a result, people in different cultures might be expected to express their emotions in different ways.

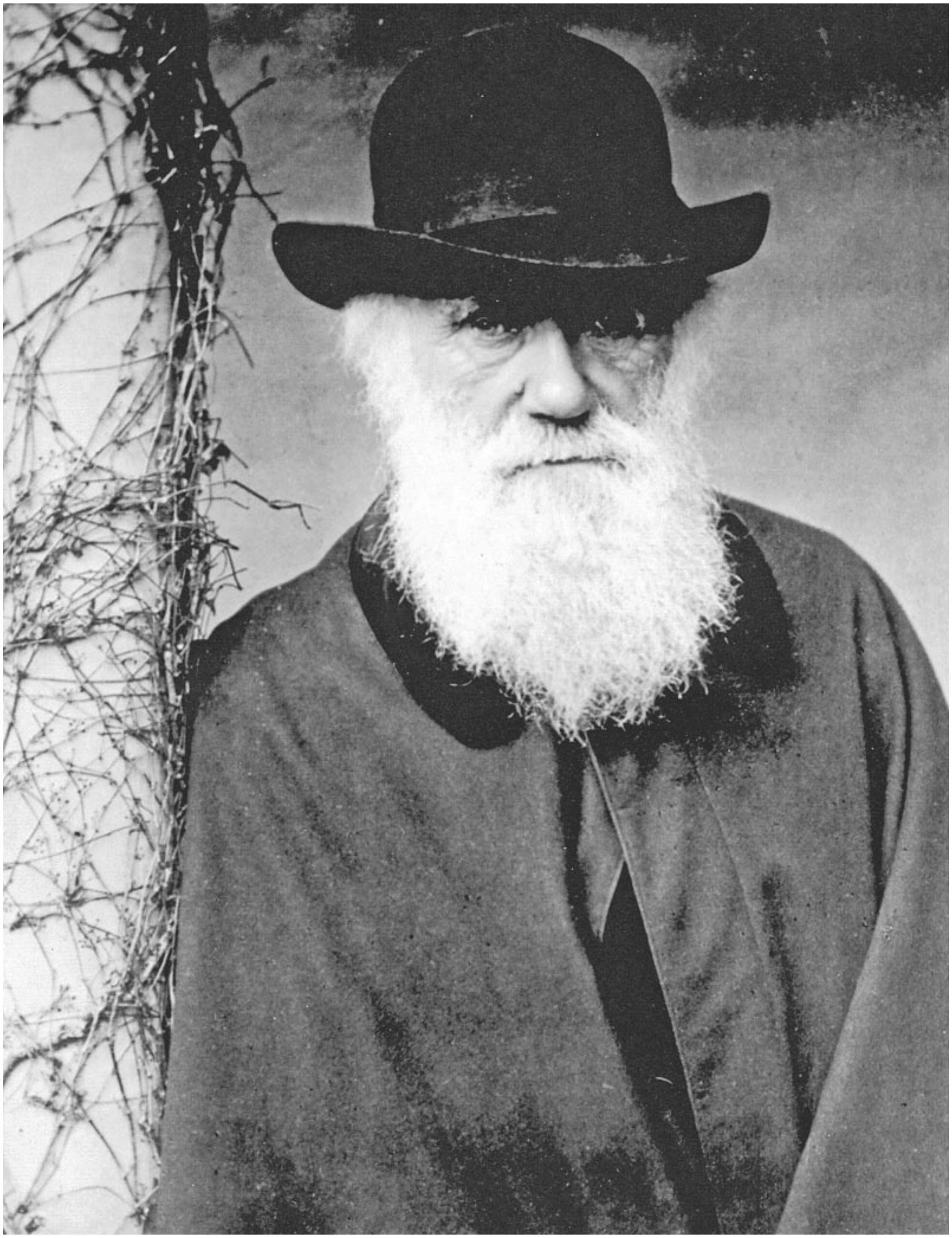
Scientific studies of emotional expression provide support for both perspectives. Just as light in all its mysteries can be described as both particle and wave, emotional expression is both universal and culturally variable.

Darwin and Emotional Expression

The modern study of emotional expression began with Charles Darwin’s writings about where emotions come from. After his travels aboard the *Beagle*, Darwin detailed his evolutionary perspective on emotional expression in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872). In making his case, Darwin proposed the idea that the expressions of human emotion we observe today derive from actions that proved useful in our evolutionary past. For example, the observable signs of anger—the furrowed brow and display of teeth, the tightened posture and clenched fists, the fierce growl—are vestiges of threat displays and attack behavior that proved useful in our evolutionary past in encounters with adversaries and negotiations surrounding the distribution of resources (Addessi et al., 2020).



SIGNALING INTENTIONS Darwin believed that animals signal their intentions through behavioral displays. (A) This dog is signaling his hostile intentions toward another dog. (B) This dog signals submission to another dog. Remind you of any other species? Our own, for instance?



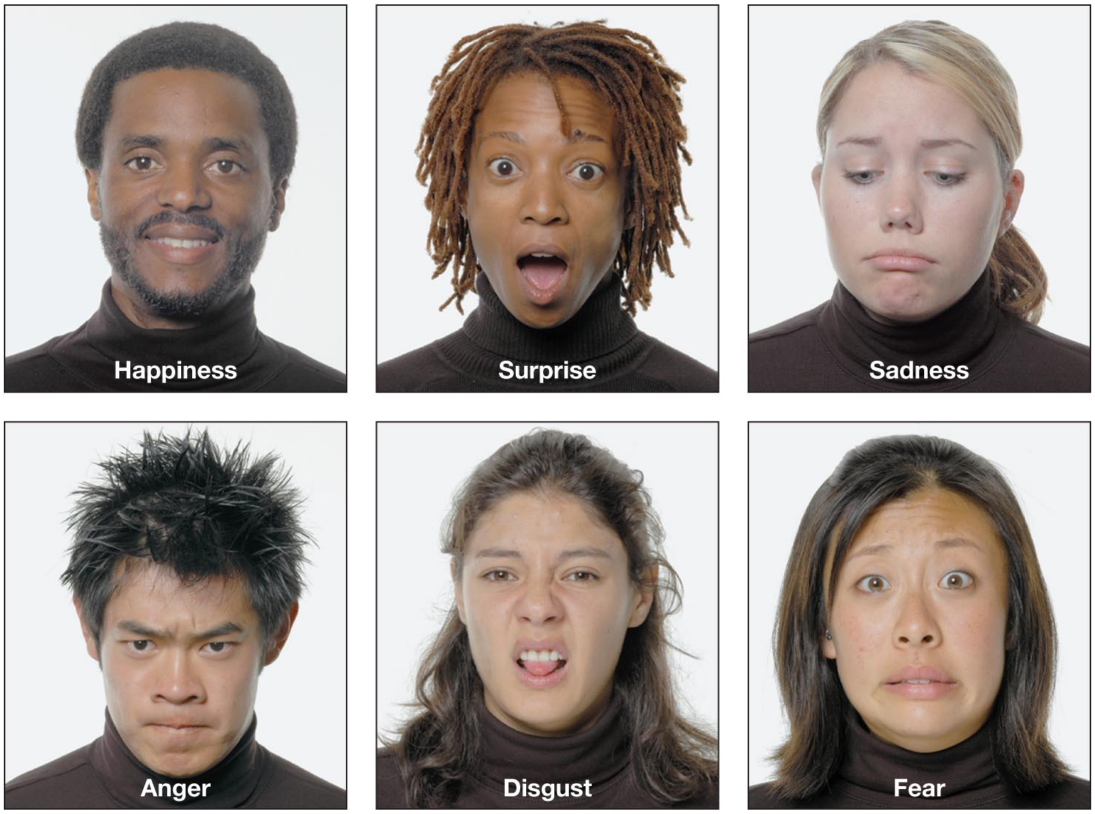
CHARLES DARWIN In addition to developing the theory of evolution, Darwin studied emotional expressions in humans and nonhuman species. He sought to document that human emotional expressions have parallels in other species and are universal to people of all cultures.

Darwin’s detailed analysis generated three hypotheses about the universality of emotional expression. First, Darwin reasoned that because all humans use the same 30–40 facial muscles to communicate emotions, people in all cultures will likely communicate and perceive emotion in a similar fashion. Second, Darwin reasoned that because humans share an evolutionary history with other mammals, most recently primates, our emotionally expressive behaviors should resemble those of other species. In support of this thesis, Darwin drew many parallels between human emotion and the behaviors of animals in the London Zoo. Third, Darwin argued that blind individuals, lacking the rich visual input that a culture provides about how to express emotion, will still show expressions similar to those of sighted people because the tendency to express emotions in specific ways has been encoded by evolutionary processes.

The Universality of Facial Expression

Interested in the universality of emotional expression, Darwin asked British missionaries living in other cultures whether they had observed expressions not seen in contemporary Victorian England. The missionaries could come up with no such expressions. That evidence is anecdotal, but some 100 years later, the question of universality was pursued more systematically by Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen as well as Carroll Izard (Ekman, Sorenson, & Friesen, 1969; Izard, 1971; Tomkins, 1962, 1963).

CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH ON EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION To test Darwin’s universality hypothesis, Ekman and Friesen took more than 3,000 photographs of people, including a sample of actors, as they expressed anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise (Ekman et al., 1969). They then presented a selection of these photos to people in Japan, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and the United States, who selected from the six emotion terms the one that best matched the feeling being communicated in each photo. Across these five cultures, accuracy rates were in the 70–90 percent range for the six emotions. If participants had been merely guessing, they would have succeeded only 16.7 percent of the time. These findings seemed to provide evidence that emotions are indeed universal.



SIX UNIVERSAL FACIAL EXPRESSIONS OF EMOTION

Critics of Ekman and Friesen were unconvinced, and they noted a fundamental flaw in this study: The participants had all been exposed to Western media and therefore might have learned how to identify the expressions through that exposure.

The investigators thus faced a stiff challenge: to find a culture that had little or no exposure to Westerners or to Western media. To meet that challenge, Ekman traveled to Papua

New Guinea to work with the Fore (pronounced *FOR-ay*), an isolated hill tribe. The Fore who participated in Ekman’s study had seen no movies or magazines, didn’t speak English or pidgin (a combination of English and a native language), had never lived in Western settlements, and had never worked for Westerners. Working with members of the Fore community, Ekman devised an emotion-appropriate story for each of the six emotions. For example, the sadness story was: “The person’s child had died, and he felt sad.” For adults in the study, Ekman presented photos of three different expressions alongside a story that matched one of the expressions, and he asked participants to match the story to the appropriate expression (Ekman & Friesen, 1971). Here, chance guessing would yield an accuracy rate of 33 percent. Children in the study were asked to select from two photos to match an expression to a story (in this case, chance guessing would be accurate 50 percent of the time). The Fore adults achieved accuracy rates ranging from 68 to 92 percent in judging the six emotions; the children achieved accuracy rates ranging from 81 to 98 percent.

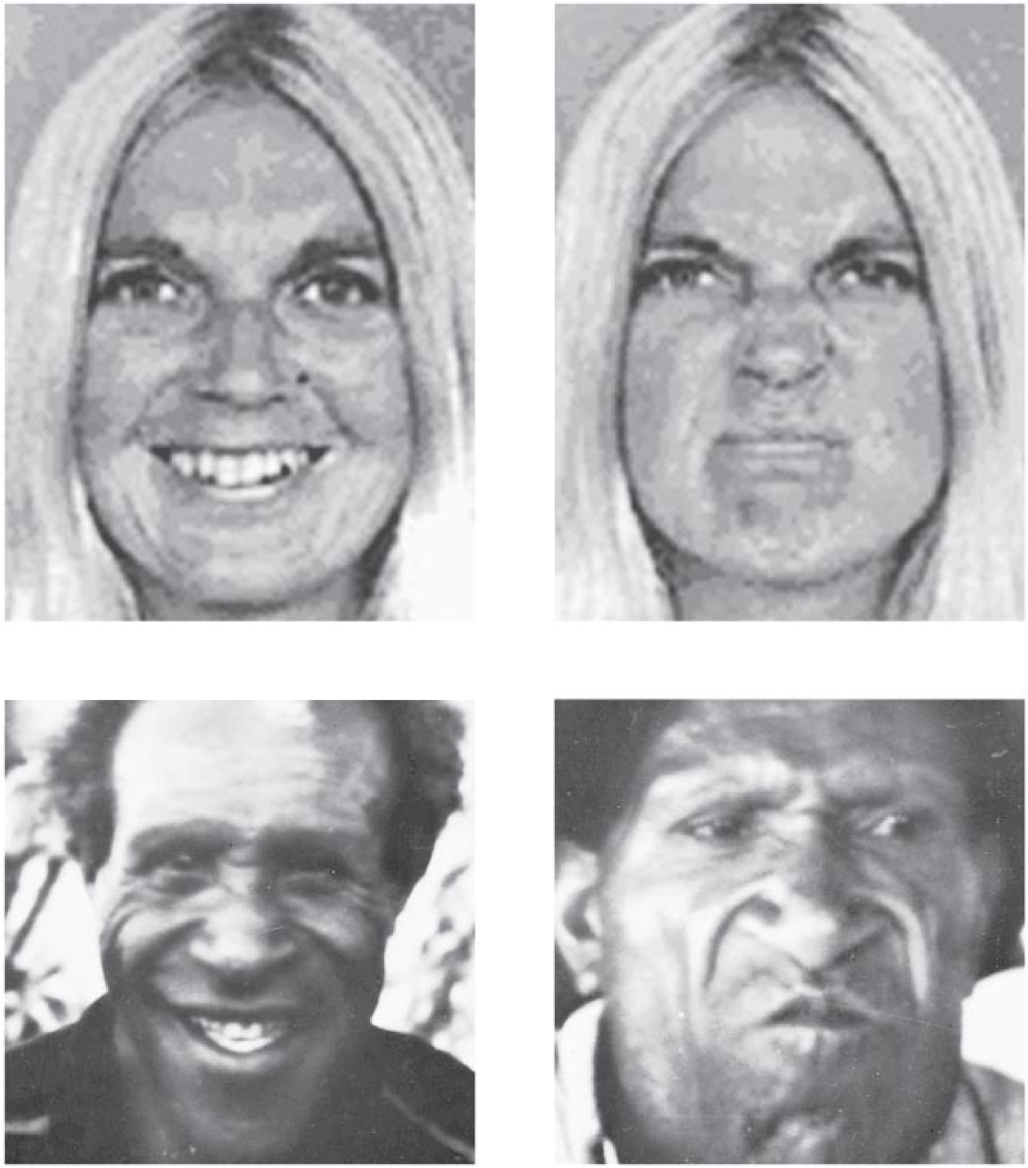


FIGURE 5.1 **RECOGNIZING FACIAL EXPRESSIONS OF EMOTION** Groups of Americans and Fore tribe members in Papua New Guinea both reliably judged the emotions expressed in these photos at higher rates of accuracy than would be expected by chance. This study demonstrated that facial expressions of emotion have been shaped by evolution and are universal. Source: Adapted from Ekman et al., 1969.

Ekman also videotaped the posed expressions of Fore participants communicating emotion as they imagined being the person in the six emotion-specific stories. Then, he presented these clips to American college students, who selected from the six emotion terms the one that best matched each pose (**Figure 5.1**). The students labeled the posed expressions of the Fore with above-chance accuracy for each emotion except fear. Over 90 subsequent studies have replicated these results, finding that people from cultures that differ in religion, political structure, economic development, and independence versus interdependence nevertheless agree in how they label the photos depicting happiness, surprise, sadness, anger, disgust, and fear (Ekman, 1984, 1993; Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002, 2003; Izard, 1971, 1994).

MOVING BEYOND SIX EMOTIONS Think for a moment, though. Are facial displays of anger, disgust, fear, sadness, surprise, and a smile all there is to emotional expression? What about the emotional expressions involved in flirtation and falling in love? Or when playing sports or learning new things? Inspired by Ekman and Friesen’s early findings, social psychologists have studied how people communicate emotions other than those that Ekman studied in Papua New Guinea. They have charted the facial expressions observed when romantic partners engage in loving conversations, when friends tease each other, and when people are confused by or interested in something someone else is saying (Keltner et al., 2019). Still other studies have investigated whether people in different cultures can reliably perceive a wide array of emotions in still photos (e.g., Cordaro et al., 2020). This research makes the case for more than 15 distinct facial expressions, including those of several positive emotions, such as amusement, desire, interest, love, and pride, and a number of self-conscious emotions we will consider later.

BOX 5.2

FOCUS ON HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Identifying Facial Expressions

Match the facial expression in each photo to an emotion below.

1. Amusement: feeling funny, humorous, or lighthearted
2. Anger: feeling offended, opposed, or treated unfairly
3. Boredom: feeling uninterested, uninspired, or bland
4. Confusion: feeling unclear, bewildered, or uncertain
5. Desire: feeling attracted, excited, or aroused
6. Disgust: feeling repulsed, nauseous, or sickened
7. Embarrassment: feeling discomfort, shy, or awkward
8. Fear: feeling a sense of threat, danger, or uncertainty
9. Interest: feeling captivated, curious, and fascinated
10. Pain: feeling suffering, aches, or torment
11. Pride: feeling confident, strong, or powerful
12. Sadness: feeling grief, loss, and helplessness
13. Shame: feeling inadequate, dishonored, or disgraced
14. Surprise: feeling astonished, shocked, or startled
15. Sympathy: feeling concern, compassion, or kindness

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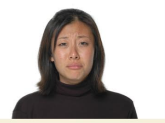
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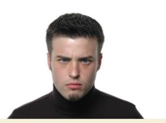
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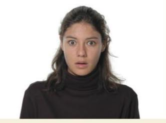
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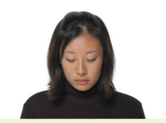
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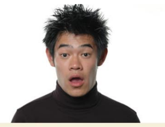
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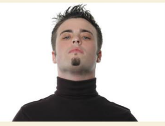
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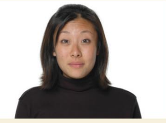
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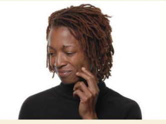
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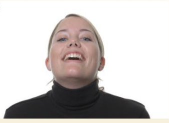
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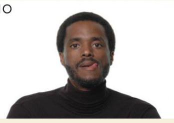
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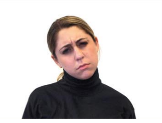
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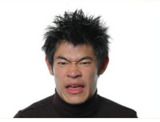
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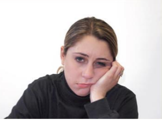
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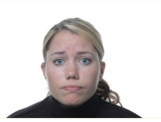
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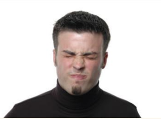
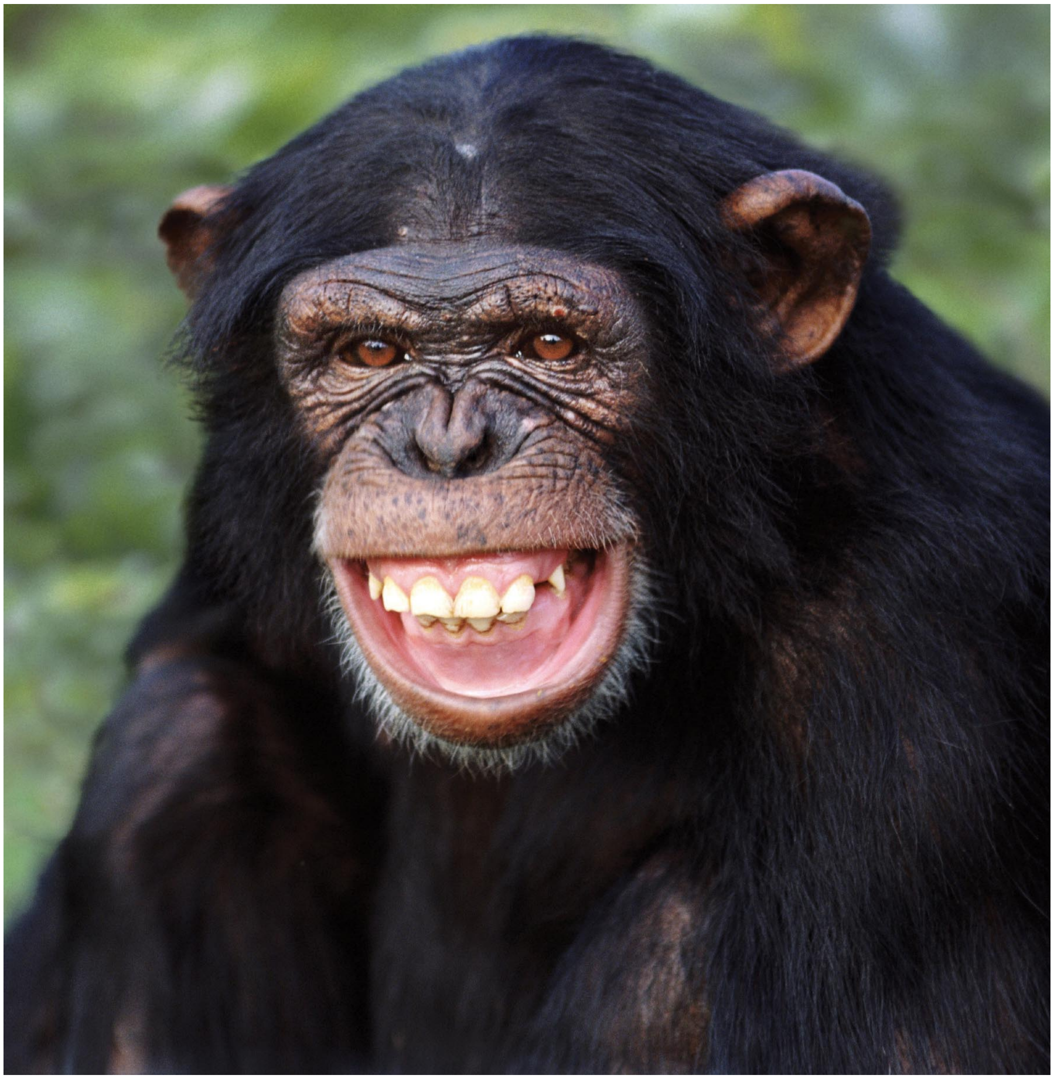


In a recent study, Alan Cowen and his colleagues analyzed over six million videos posted online from 144 countries (Cowen et al., 2021). They identified the contexts that people were in, such as watching fireworks, listening to music, or celebrating at a wedding. They also identified which of 16 facial expressions people showed in these circumstances. Across the 144 countries, people showed very similar facial expressions in certain specific contexts. When watching fireworks, people around the world expressed awe, for example. When exerting themselves physically, they expressed pain. When out shopping, interest. This study provides more evidence of the universality of emotional expressions.

To see how well you recognize many of the emotional expressions we have described thus far, try the test in Box 5.2.

EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION IN OTHER ANIMALS Darwin’s second claim—that our emotional expressions resemble those of our mammalian relatives—may seem intuitive to you. Perhaps you’ve noticed clear signs of mirthful play or anger in your dog or seen soothing embraces between chimpanzees at a zoo. This intuition is supported by studies in which scientists have observed that other mammals express emotions in ways that resemble human expression (Cowen & Keltner, 2021). For example, chimps show threat displays and emit whimpers that are remarkably similar to our own displays of anger and sadness. When interacting in a friendly fashion, nonhuman primates show the “silent bared-teeth display” that resembles our smile, and when playing and wrestling, they exhibit the “relaxed open-mouth display,” the predecessor to the human laugh (Preuschoft, 1992). Similarly, many of the brief sounds humans use to communicate emotion—shrieks, laughs, cries, growls, and “mmms” when eating delicious food—resemble the emotion-related calls of other primates (Cordaro et al., 2016). Many social mammals soothe and embrace others in acts of tactile communication, behaviors with close parallels to loving and compassionate human touch.



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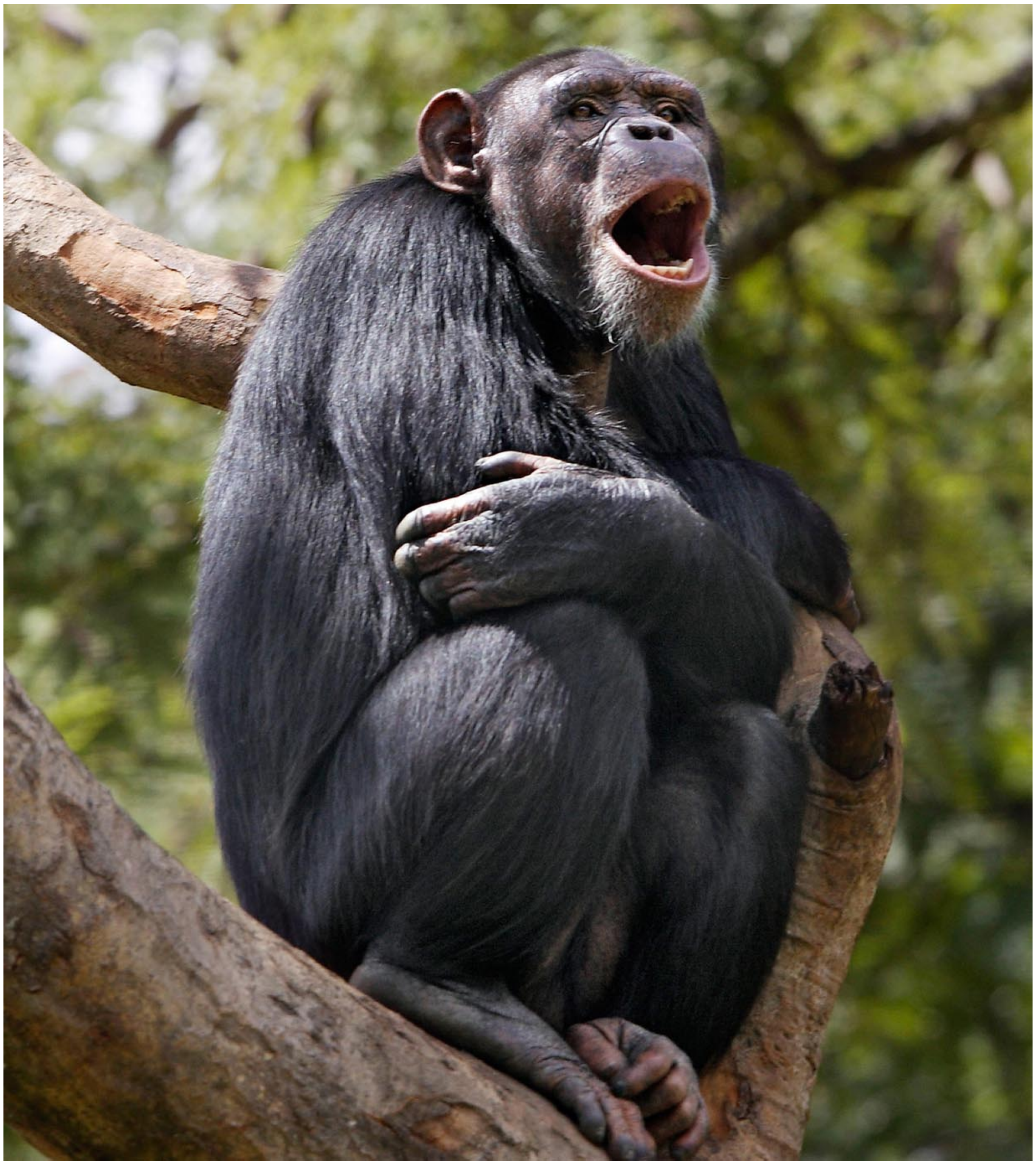
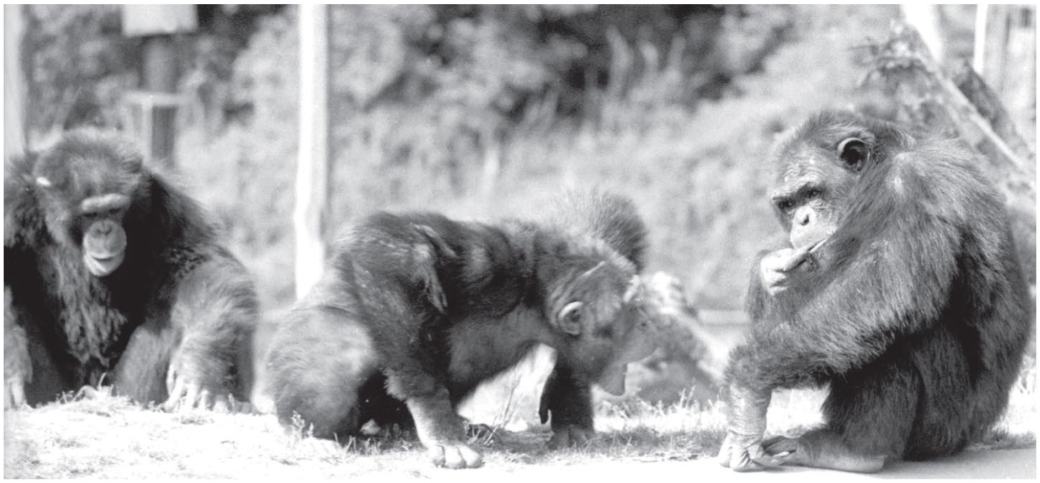


(B)

ORIGINS OF OUR EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIONS These chimpanzees demonstrate two facial expressions that resemble those of humans. (A) The silent bared-teeth display, like a smile. (B) The relaxed open-mouth display, like a laugh.

Understanding the parallels between human and nonhuman expression has also helped reveal why we express embarrassment as we do. Participants in these kinds of studies have been led to experience embarrassment in various ways. In one of the most mortifying, participants had to watch recordings of themselves singing “The Star-Spangled Banner” in the presence of other research participants. When feeling embarrassed, people shift their gaze down, smile in a self-conscious way, move their head down and to the side, thus exposing their neck, and often touch their face or shrug their shoulders (C. R. Harris, 2001; Keltner, 1995). Why do we express embarrassment in these ways? Cross-species comparisons reveal that our expression of embarrassment resembles other mammals’ appeasement displays, which function like apologies that short-circuit conflict and trigger affiliation (Keltner & Buswell, 1997).

(A)



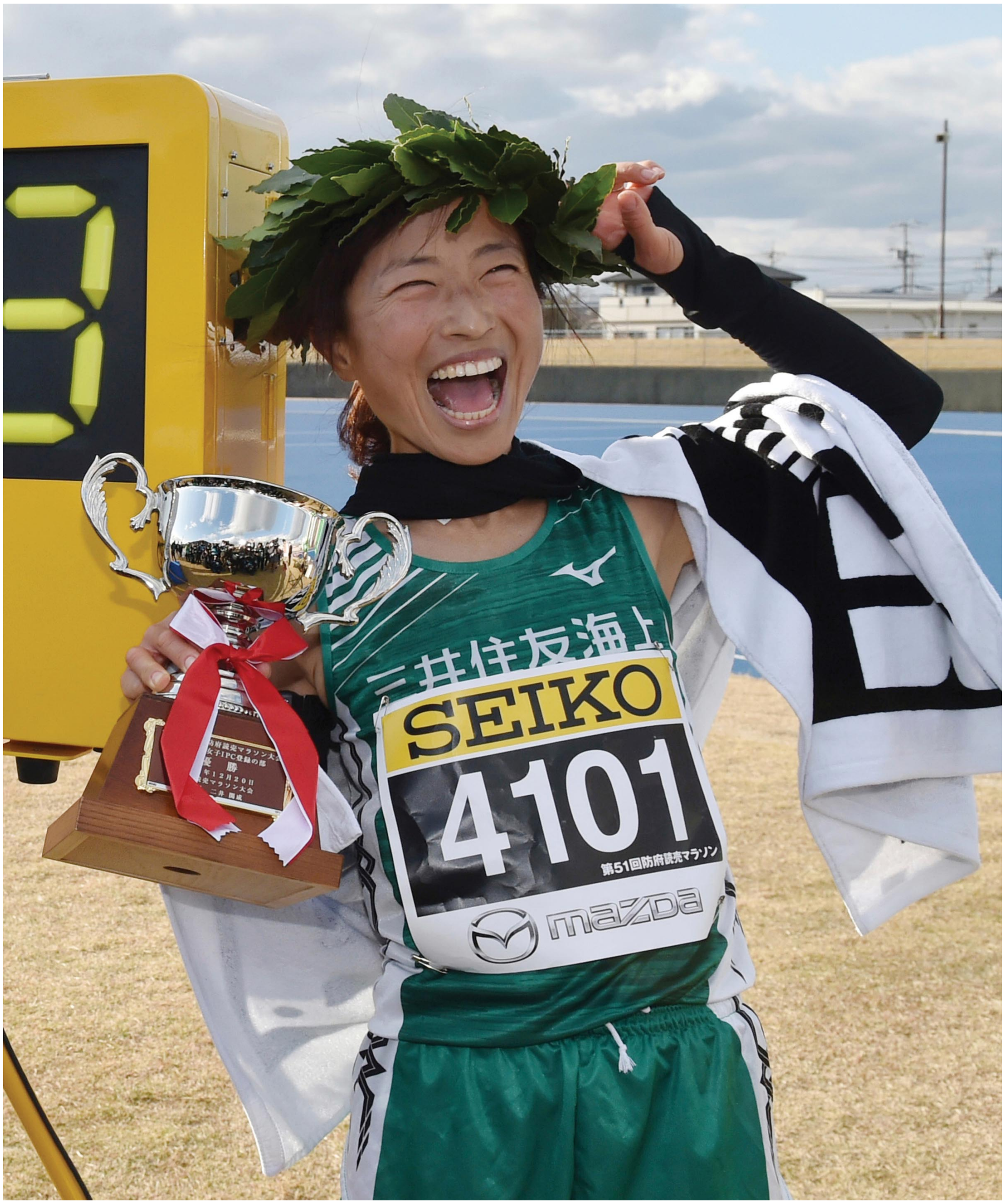
(B)

EMBARRASSMENT, APPEASEMENT, AND MAINTAINING SOCIAL BONDS
To maintain harmonious social relations, humans often exhibit behaviors that are reminiscent of appeasement displays in nonhuman species. (A) This woman shows the typical elements of an embarrassment display—downward gaze, head movements down and to the side, a compressed smile, and face touching—that trigger others to forgive. (B) The chimp on the right is the alpha male, who is deliberately ignoring a subordinate in the middle. The subordinate bows for the alpha male and pant-grunts loudly, which is the chimpanzee’ s way of expressing low status. Photograph by Frans de Waal.

SOCIAL BENEFITS OF EMBARRASSMENT President Kennedy shows classic signs of embarrassment and remorse, including the head movements, downward gaze, and nervous face touching. Although conveying regret, this display causes others to trust the individual more.

In humans, embarrassment signals remorse for social transgressions, prompting forgiveness and reconciliation after an individual has violated a social norm (R. S. Miller & Leary, 1992). One study found that when people encounter strangers who show embarrassment or blush visibly, as opposed to displaying no emotion or other emotions such as pride, they trust those strangers more and think they have more upstanding characters (van Dijk, de Jong, & Peters, 2009). Another study found that people will even give more lottery tickets to such individuals, thereby increasing the strangers’ chances of winning a cash prize (Feinberg, Willer, & Keltner, 2012).

Well-timed displays of embarrassment can serve people well. Early in his presidency, John F. Kennedy approved a disastrous attempt to overthrow Cuban dictator Fidel Castro. Kennedy immediately took public ownership of the failure and apologized for his poor leadership. His approval ratings, already high, spiked following his apology and his honest and open signs of embarrassment.



UNIVERSAL EXPRESSIONS OF EMOTION This blind Japanese marathon runner shows elements of the universal pride display—arms thrust upward and chest expanding with a triumphant smile—after setting the world record mark for the marathon.

EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AMONG THE BLIND Recent studies of pride and shame bring together Darwin’s ideas about cross-species similarities, universality, and the expressions of emotion by those born without eyesight. Pride is the feeling associated with our desire to gain status through socially valued actions (Sznycer, 2019). The emotion is reliably signaled in humans with dominance behaviors seen in other mammals: chest expansion, head movements up and back, and upward arm thrusts (Tracy & Robins, 2004). And the emotion appears to be universal: When Jessica Tracy and Richard Robins traveled to Burkina Faso, a country in Africa, they found that a remote tribe there could readily identify displays of pride from photos (Tracy & Robins, 2007).

Studies of blind individuals have shown that their expressions of emotion are remarkably similar to those of sighted people. Tracy and David Matsumoto (2008) analyzed the emotional expressions of sighted and blind Olympic athletes from 37 countries just after they had either won or lost a judo competition. Congenitally blind athletes, who made up part of the sample, had never received visual input from their culture about how to express emotions nonverbally. But sure enough, after victory, both sighted and blind athletes, including those blind from birth, expressed pride by smiling, tilting their heads back, expanding their chests, and raising their arms in the air. After losing, both groups of athletes lowered their heads and slumped their shoulders in shame.

Cultural Specificity of Emotional Expression

Alongside these cross-cultural and even cross-species similarities, emotional expression often varies dramatically among cultures. For example, when anthropologists began writing about the emotional lives of people in different cultures, they noticed striking cultural variations in emotional expression. In one well-known study, the Utku Inuit of Alaska were never seen by visiting anthropologists to express anger (Briggs, 1960). Even when visiting Europeans stole their canoes or acted rudely, the Inuit showed no anger. How can we begin to understand such cultural variation in emotional reactions and emotional expression?

CULTURE AND FOCAL EMOTIONS Cultures seem to be partly defined by particular emotions. Tibet is a compassionate culture, Mexico a loving one, and Brazil an affectionate, flirtatious one. Social psychologist Batja Mesquita proposes that cultures vary in their focal emotions, those that are relatively common in the everyday lives of the members of a culture and that are experienced and expressed with greater frequency and intensity (Mesquita et al., 2016). For example, anger appears to be a more focal emotion in cultures that value honor: In these cultures, sexual slurs and insults to the family are highly charged events that trigger more anger than they do in cultures that don’t prioritize honor (Rodriguez Mosquera, Manstead, & Fischer, 2000, 2004).

Consider embarrassment and shame. These emotions convey modesty and an appreciation of others’ opinions—core concerns in some interdependent cultures. Indeed, recent studies have confirmed that shame and embarrassment are focal emotions in more interdependent cultures. In China, a highly interdependent culture, there are at least 113 words to describe shame and embarrassment, far exceeding the 25 or so synonyms in the English language (J. Li, Wang, & Fischer, 2004).

The degree to which an emotion is focal is also evident in expressive behavior. In the study of Olympic athletes considered earlier, athletes from interdependent cultures, such as China and Japan, showed more intense shoulder shrugs of shame in response to losing than did athletes from independent cultures, such as the United States (Tracy & Matsumoto, 2008).

CULTURE AND IDEAL EMOTIONS Why do some emotions become focal in a particular culture? Jeanne Tsai and her colleagues have offered one answer in their *affect valuation theory* (Tsai, 2007; Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006). According to this theory, emotions that promote important cultural ideals are valued and will tend to play a more prominent role in the social lives of individuals. For example, in the United States, excitement is greatly valued because it enables people to pursue a cultural ideal of independence and self-expression. In contrast, many East Asian cultures attach greater value to feelings of calmness and contentedness because these emotions make it easier for individuals to fit into harmonious relationships (Kitayama, Karasawa, & Mesquita, 2004).

These cultural differences in the emotions that are most valued translate into variations in emotional behavior. Americans, for example, are more likely than East Asians to participate in exciting but risky recreational practices (such as mountain biking); to advertise consumer products with models displaying broad smiles of excitement; to get addicted to excitement-enhancing drugs (cocaine); to express preferences for upbeat, exciting music rather than soothing, slower songs; and to read children’ s books that feature highly excited protagonists (Tsai, 2007). Executives, university leaders, and politicians in the West tend to display bigger, more intense smiles in the photos they put out to the public than do those in East Asian cultures (Tsai et al., 2016).

BOX 5.3

FOCUS ON NEW SOCIAL MEDIA

Expression of Emotion Online

When the founders of Google created their internet search engine and when Facebook developed its platform for sharing information openly, they may not have anticipated the extent to which people express emotion online. Consider the use of emojis. It is estimated that people send over 10 billion emojis each day in their online communications, whether they are texting or sharing photos on Instagram. According to recent studies, we send emojis—such as a heart or smiley face—to express how we feel about what is being communicated online (Lo, 2008). You might share a heart emoji to convey affection and gratitude for the support someone has shown online or a laughter emoji to convey your amusement at a GIF or video someone has shared.

Why do people express their emotions online? One reason is to share construals of complex events. Bernard Rimé and his colleagues have studied what community members share online following traumatic events, such as terrorist attacks, and how such emotional expression changes over time (Rimé et al., 2010). They find that individuals initially express distinct emotions. One person may express fear of another attack, another may react with outrage at the innocent being killed. Over time, though, individuals’ expressions of emotion online converge upon a shared emotional response to the event. This convergence of emotion in the aftermath of traumatic events leads people to report that they feel more strongly connected to their community.

How does emotional expression online shape dynamics between groups? The political conversation between liberals and conservatives? Or supporters of Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter? Given that sharing emotion online seems to build community *within* groups, one might imagine that the online expression of emotion will give rise to greater polarization *between* groups. A recent study reveals how. William Brady and colleagues looked at the tweets of thousands of citizens related to three politically divisive issues: gun policy, gay rights, and climate change (Brady et al., 2017). Their intention was to determine what sort of content led certain tweets to be shared more than others among Twitter users. They found that tweets were more likely to be shared when they used words with moral emotional content, such as “hate,” “pervert,” “shame,” “fight,” and “war.” Below are a couple examples of tweets—the first from a conservative and the second from a liberal. Both have moral emotional content, and both proved to be viral.

> America needs to Arm itself. Stand and **Fight** for Your Second Amendment Rights. We are literally in a **War** Zone. Carry and get Trained.

> New Mormon Policy Bans Children Of Same-Sex Parents-this church wants to **punish** children? Are you kidding me?!? **Shame**

Subsequent research by Brady and colleagues has found that people online are more likely to express approval of tweets that have higher moral emotion (Brady et al., 2021). The lesson here is that while online emotional expression may make us feel closer to our groups, those very same processes may increase the political divides of our times.

Tsai’s affect valuation theory has recently been applied to Latino cultures. Compared with Western European and East Asian Cultures, Latino cultures place greater value on *simpatía*, or promoting social interactions that are warm and affectionate (A. M. Acevedo et al., 2020). Does this difference translate to cultural differences in emotion? Indeed it does. Studies find, for example, that compared with East Asian American individuals, Mexican American individuals reported that they are more likely to express and experience gratitude with others, an emotion that creates warm social interactions (Corona et al., 2020).

CULTURE AND EMOTION REGULATION Emotion regulation refers to the ways in which people modify their emotions to make themselves feel better or to fit the present context. Three regulation strategies, and how they differ across cultures, have been of particular interest to social psychologists (Gross, 2015). First, people often rethink, or reappraise, the reasons they are feeling as they do. Frustrated with a friend’s behavior, a person may rethink why the friend acted that way and arrive at a more or less charitable attribution. A second regulation strategy is to accept current emotional circumstances, to understand that our emotions are fleeting and their causes typically change. Perhaps you might find some wisdom in this regulation strategy, recognizing that the sources of negative emotions, such as difficulties at work or the loss of a romantic partner, change over time (Ford et al., 2018).

CULTURE AND THE VALUING OF EMOTION People in the United States have been found to engage in thrilling and dangerous recreational practices, such as skateboarding, because of the value they place upon feeling excited.

A third regulation strategy is emotional suppression, which occurs when people minimize the outward signs of their emotion. For example, you might resist the urge to laugh at a friend fumbling a romantic quest or the anger you feel around a lazy coworker. Cultures vary in when and how powerfully they encourage people to engage in emotional suppression. In many Asian cultures, it’s inappropriate to speak of personal enthusiasms, and people may also suppress their expressions of pleasure at personal success. More broadly, in studies across dozens of cultures, people from interdependent cultures reported being more likely to suppress positive emotional expressions than people from independent cultures and to temper their experience of positive emotion with negative emotions (Matsumoto et al., 2008; Mesquita & Leu, 2007; Schimmack, Oishi, & Diener, 2002).

LOOKING BACK

The fundamental ideas of Charles Darwin have inspired dozens of studies that find that human emotional expression is to a considerable extent universal, is seen in other species, and is evident in individuals who are blind from birth. At the same time, cultures vary in their focal emotions, having richer vocabularies for those emotions and encouraging their expression in nonverbal behavior. People of different cultures vary in the emotions they value. And cultures differ in how they regulate emotions, especially in the degree to which people are encouraged to suppress the outward expression of emotion.

Glossary

focal emotion

An emotion that is especially common within a particular culture.

emotion regulation

The ability to alter one’s own emotional state. It may involve behaviors such as rethinking a challenging situation to reduce anger or anxiety, hiding visible signs of sadness or fear, or focusing on reasons to feel happy or calm.

reappraisal

The process of reinterpreting the causes of an emotion and its meaning for the individual.

acceptance

Adopting an open and welcoming attitude to one’s emotions.

suppression

An emotion regulation strategy by which people attenuate the outward signs of the emotion.

Emotions and Social Relationships

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe the basic idea of a social functional theory of emotion.
- Describe how emotions promote commitment in relationships.
- Explain how emotions coordinate group action and identity.

Emotions lie at the heart of family life, romance, friendship, and work. Emotions animate social movements and inspire political protest. They are central to our experiences of culture, such as musical events, weddings, and funerals. Upon reflection, it’s hard to imagine any meaningful social interaction or relationship that doesn’t involve emotion.

Recognizing this, social psychologists have offered what is known as social functional theory (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Niedenthal & Brauer, 2012; van Kleef & Côté, 2022). According to this theory, emotions and their accompanying patterns of experience, expression, and physiology enable people to form, maintain, and negotiate the relationships that matter most to them. Emotions do this work by shifting our construal of the social context and animating specific actions—in the service of, for example, building commitment with a romantic partner or negotiating status within a hierarchy.

Very often we learn deep lessons about emotions from studies of people whose emotional lives are disrupted by brain trauma. The central role of emotions in social relationships is illustrated in the tale of Eadweard Muybridge. Muybridge was one of the most innovative photographers in the history of the art, known for his cold, analytical photos of Yosemite and human bodies in motion. To pay his bills, he ran a rare book store with his brother during the Gold Rush era in San Francisco. On one of Muybridge’s trips back east in search of books, the driver of his stagecoach lost control, and Muybridge was hurled out of the coach, smashing headfirst into a tree. After the accident, he was a different man. Although his language and reasoning abilities remained intact, he became remote, aloof, and cold. He had trouble in his family life, at work, and in his sense of connection to society overall.

What caused Muybridge’s social difficulties? Social neuroscience provides one answer. We now know that Muybridge damaged his orbitofrontal cortex, a region of the frontal lobes right behind the eye sockets. People who damage this area lose the ability to rely on their emotions to act in ways that fit their current situation, and as a result, their relations with their romantic partners, children, friends, and work colleagues often deteriorate, as do their interactions with strangers. The difficulties these patients endure tell us how important emotions are to healthy social relationships (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989; van Kleef, 2009). Our fleeting expressions of emotion—of sympathy, anger, pride, or desire, for example—are more than just momentary readouts of how we feel. They also coordinate our interactions with others in ways that typically strengthen ties—when playing on a team, making amends with a friend, soothing a distressed child, or flirting with someone who’s caught our eye. Knowing how others feel provides critical information that guides our own socially savvy action. In fact, studies find that at every stage of life, people who are aware of their own feelings and those of other people fare better in their social relationships: They have more friends at age 5, get along better with romantic partners in their 30s, and do better at work in the middle of life (Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011; English, John, & Gross, 2013; Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008).

EMOTIONS IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS Emotions often determine the quality and stability of romantic relationships. If this couple can maintain humor, gratitude, and other positive emotions throughout their relationship, they will be less likely to separate.

In this section, we follow the sad tale of Eadweard Muybridge to explore in more detail how emotions enable strong social relationships.

Promoting Commitment in Familial Relationships and Friendships

After his accident, Muybridge struggled with commitment in his closest relationships. He felt distant from his wife, Flora. He never developed an attachment to his young son. Healthy, long-term relationships require that we solve what economist Robert Frank refers to as the “commitment problem”: We must regularly sacrifice for others even when we are tempted to do otherwise (Frank, 1988). When we consider how common divorce is (see Chapter 9), it’s clear that this is no simple task. Lacking the ability to feel the appropriate emotions, Muybridge felt little commitment to his wife and son.

Emotions help solve the commitment problem in two ways. Both of which serve to strengthen our most intimate relationships, including romantic relationships and friendships. First, the expression of certain emotions signals our commitment to others’ well-being. For example, research finds that when college students express gratitude to new acquaintances at college, they form more committed friendships with those people over time (Algoe, Fredrickson, & Gable, 2013). Second, emotions can motivate us to act in ways that prioritize the well-being of others. Feelings of guilt can be painful, but they often lead us to do things—apologize, make amends, sacrifice—that lead others to feel recognized and appreciated (Schaumberg & Flynn, 2012). Anger can be profoundly unpleasant, but it can motivate us to defend someone who has been wronged, even at great cost to ourselves (E. Fehr & Gächter, 2002).

THE NEUROCHEMISTRY OF COMMITMENT It turns out that there’s a chemical, oxytocin, that fosters emotions that strengthen commitment in long-term familial relationships and friendships. Oxytocin is produced in the hypothalamus and released into the brain and bloodstream (Bartz, 2016). Recent research has found that after the birth of a new child, parents’ oxytocin levels rise to enable the caregiving required for vulnerable offspring (Feldman, Braun, & Champagne, 2019). This is true of mothers and fathers in both different-sex and same-sex relationships. In nonhuman species, oxytocin promotes romantic commitment or pair bonding: the preference for one mate over desirable alternatives. When scientists give an injection of oxytocin to montane voles, who do not display pair bonding, they stay close to a sexual partner even when desirable voles are placed nearby (J. R. Williams et al., 1994).

In experiments with humans, social psychologists have administered oxytocin via nasal spray to some participants and a saline spray (the control) to others and compared the effects. When administered oxytocin, people are more generous and cooperative, they look more consistently at other people’ s faces, and they score higher on tests of empathy, the tendency to know and feel what others feel (Bartz, 2016).

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THE EFFECT OF OXYTOCIN ON COMMITMENT Research demonstrating that oxytocin promotes commitment and love might have had something to do with the development of the perfume Pheromax, whose selling feature is the oxytocin included in its chemical makeup.

You might think that oxytocin could be a solution to today’s political problems—just give White supremacist and antifa protesters a whiff of oxytocin, and their animosity might subside. Alas, it’s not so simple. In fact, such a notion might actually backfire. Carsten de Dreu and his colleagues have shown that oxytocin largely promotes commitment and generosity toward one’s own group, but it can actually enhance biases against outgroups (de Dreu et al., 2010). You may also be wondering whether oxytocin can help with commitment problems closer to home, namely in romantic relationships. Here the answer is more promising. One experiment found that couples solved their conflicts more constructively after inhaling oxytocin (Ditzen et al., 2009).

Collaborating with Others

Muybridge’s struggles at work were among the first signs of his social difficulties. In his bookstore, he had trouble keeping promises, honoring contracts, and even engaging in polite exchanges with customers. Expressing emotions in timely ways and knowing the emotions of other people can strengthen our efforts to collaborate with them. Before infants can tell their parents what they like and don’t like, they rely on smiles, coos, and laughs to express their delight in pleasurable things that their parents have done. The same is true in our adult social lives: Smiles, laughs, warm pats on the back, and interested vocalizations are ways we express our approval of what others are doing (van Kleef, 2009).

EMOTIONAL MIMICRY AND GROUP PERFORMANCE One of the simplest ways that we collaborate with others is through *emotional mimicry*, or copying others’ emotional expressions, whether laughing, blushing, or tearing up. Studies find that 4-month-olds mirror the tongue protrusions and smiles of adults, and older children copy the postures and gestures of teachers, parents, coaches, hip hop artists, and sports stars (Bernieri & Rosenthal, 1991). As adults, we mirror others’ postures, tones of voice, smiles, frowns, blushes, and furrowed brows, often without consciously realizing it. Correlational studies suggest that when we mimic the emotions of those around us, we collaborate more effectively and enhance our collective performance (Gelfand et al., 2020). Cricket teams in England batted better when their laughter and joy spread to one another (Totterdell, 2000). When musicians in string quartets sway their bodies more in unison, their performances are of higher quality (Chang et al., 2017). Emotional mimicry enables greater collaboration. It also makes people more cooperative, not just with their fellow team members but also with other people generally (Wiltermuth & Heath, 2009).

TOUCH AND COLLABORATION Let’s consider how another modality of emotional expression—touch—enables smooth interactions between people. A deftly placed touch can encourage another person’s action or dissuade someone from behaving inappropriately. A tactile expression of gratitude or love rewards others for actions we find desirable. In one study that examined this idea, a toucher and a touchee sat at a table with a black curtain between them, preventing all communication other than touch between the two (Hertenstein et al., 2006). The toucher attempted to convey different emotions by making contact with the touchee for 1 second on the forearm—for example, smoothly stroking the arm to convey compassion or lightly clasping and shaking the arm a bit to convey gratitude. Upon being touched, the touchee selected which emotion had been communicated from a list of emotion terms. As you can see in **Figure 5.2**, participants could reliably communicate love, sympathy, and gratitude with brief tactile contact—emotions that convey commitment and can provide rewarding experiences to others.

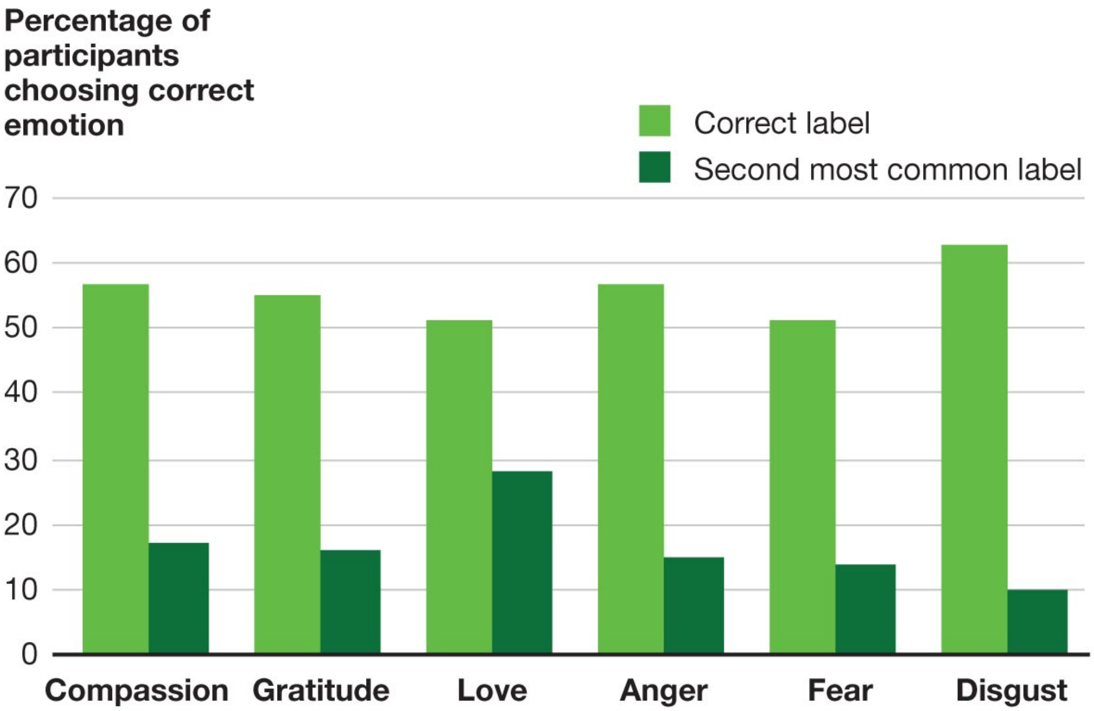


FIGURE 5.2 **COMMUNICATING EMOTION THROUGH TOUCH** With a brief touch to the forearm, participants in this study could reliably communicate different emotions to a stranger. Source: Adapted from Hertenstein et al., 2006.

Other research shows how the right kind of touch can prompt people to act collaboratively. For example, Michael Kraus and his colleagues coded all the touches—high fives, fist bumps, head slaps, and bear hugs—that basketball teammates in the NBA made during one game at the beginning of the 2008 season (Kraus, Huang, & Keltner, 2010). Each player touched his teammates for only about an average of 2 seconds during the game. Still, teams who touched more early in the season played better later in the season, even when controlling for how well the teams were playing in the games in which the touch was coded, how much money the players were making, and the preseason expectations for each team. Naturally, this study was not a pure experiment—in the sense that players were not randomly assigned to touch their teammates or not—and this weakens the inferences that can be drawn from its results.

Finding Our Group Identity Through Emotion

BAKER
11
PAYTON
14
USA

TOUCH AND COOPERATION ON THE BASKETBALL COURT Athletic teams in which teammates touch each other more play better. In 2000, the U.S. national basketball team celebrated the Olympic gold medal with many kinds of touch.

Like many people with damaged frontal lobes, Muybridge became an outcast with little sense of connection to others. He cared little for social outings. He stopped dressing in accord with the fashion of his times. And, lacking the guidance of emotions, he had little sense of belonging in his community or in society more generally.

Certain emotions help us feel like we are a part of larger social collectives. When we share humor and laughter with others, we feel we are part of the same community. Our feelings of collective pride, at a favorite team’s victory, for example, signal to us how specific groups are important to our sense of self (Liu et al., 2021). Perhaps the best example of how emotions signal our collective identity is the emotion of awe, the feeling of being in the presence of something vast that transcends our understanding of the world (Keltner & Haidt, 2003). We often feel awe in collective situations—at political rallies, sporting events, concerts, and dance performances. Many stimuli that elicit awe—music, inspiring leaders, art, and religious rituals—are central to the core values and institutions of a culture (Van Cappellen & Rimé, 2014). And studies find that compared with experiences of other positive emotions, brief experiences of awe—for example, watching an awe-inspiring nature video, taking a stroll amid tall trees, or standing near a replica of *T. rex*—increase people’s sense of belonging with others. People feeling awe are more likely to define themselves in terms of collective traits (“I am an environmentalist”). They are also more likely to report feeling embedded in stronger, more interconnected social networks (Bai et al., 2017; Shiota, Keltner, & Mossman, 2007).

FINDING OUR PLACE WITHIN GROUPS Emotions not only help us identify with certain groups but also enable us to find our place, or status, within them. Join just about any kind of group—a political or recreational group, a team, a sorority or fraternity—and you’ll quickly find that you have a rank within it. People often negotiate their status within groups through their experiences and expressions of emotion. Jessica Tracy and her colleagues have found that feelings of pride lead people to engage in acts, such as speaking up or taking charge, that can lead to increased social status (Weidman, Tracy, & Elliot, 2016). Expressions of pride signal to others an individual’s elevated status (Tracy & Robins, 2007). People who display pride nonverbally are also more likely to be imitated and followed by others. In one study, participants taking a test were more likely to copy the answer of a confederate displaying pride than they were to copy someone displaying than other emotions (Martens & Tracy, 2013).

Anger can also signal dominance, and, much like pride, its expression can lead people to gain power and status. For example, when negotiators express anger, they are more likely to get their way and prompt more subordinate behavior in their counterparts (Sinaceur & Tiedens, 2006; van Kleef et al., 2006). An old adage of trial lawyers is that when you have the law on your side, you should argue the law; when you have the facts on your side, you should argue the facts; and when you have neither on your side, you should pound the table!

"I brought out the meekness in others."

Other emotions motivate people to act in ways that influence the status of others. One such emotion is envy. There are many reasons to disapprove of envy—it can lead to malicious backstabbing and rumormongering, for example. Despite these problematic outcomes, current thinking holds that envy also plays a role in locating individuals within social hierarchies. In making this argument, researchers have distinguished between malicious envy ("I want to pull that person down to my level") and benign envy ("I want the status that person has"). People feel more malicious forms of envy when other people enjoy unjustified status, perhaps by rising in the ranks thanks to underhanded or selfish deeds. Studies find that these experiences of envy lead people to engage in actions that undermine the status of those individuals who have gained status through selfish actions (Crusius et al., 2020; van de Ven & Zeelenberg, 2020). More benign forms of envy, on the other hand, are felt toward individuals who deserve their standing. These experiences of envy motivate different actions, namely those, such as hard work, that elevate the envious person’s standing within the group.

LOOKING BACK

Emotions serve social functions. They enable the formation, maintenance, and negotiation of relationships that matter most to us, and they help us communicate our commitment to others and build trust. Our emotional expressions, such as touch, serve as rewards in interactions and help coordinate behavior between people. Emotions such as pride, shame, and envy help us know our place within groups.

Glossary

social functional theory

The broad idea that emotions coordinate social interactions in ways that enable people to meet social opportunities and challenges.

Emotions and Understanding the Social World

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Explain how emotions guide social perception.
- Describe how positive emotions broaden our thinking.

Many of our most important decisions—what job to take, what club to join, whom to marry, which neighborhood to live in—rely on gut feelings. Philosophers have long argued that this is not a good thing. Our emotions, according to this line of thought, are less sophisticated than reason and can lead to impulsive, misguided decisions (Oatley, 2004). The metaphors we use to describe our feelings betray this belief: We speak of emotions as forms of insanity (“I’m madly in love”) and disease (“I’m sick with envy”) rather than forms of clarity and health. Are we better off when reason is in control of our passions?

It is certainly true that emotions bias how we see the world. But psychologists have made the case that this is often, and even typically, a good thing. Emotions prioritize the information we should focus on and factor into our decisions and actions (Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 2011). Sometimes this leads to problematic biases, but often emotions guide perception, reasoning, and judgment in ways that enable quick and adaptive responses to challenges and opportunities in the environment (Lerner et al., 2015).

Emotions Influence Perception

After the death of a loved one, bereaved individuals often experience recurring and profound sadness. For many months, and very often longer, their perceptions are imbued with the qualities of sadness and loss: A piece of music may trigger recollections of a first date; a room or object in the house will prompt memories of the past; a falling leaf may elicit thoughts about the shortness of life. The idea that emotions influence perception is found in color-based metaphors that portray emotions as lenses through which we perceive our circumstances—sadness is blue, anger makes us see red, and happiness has us looking at the world through rose-colored glasses.

We perceive events, in other words, in ways that are consistent with the emotions we’re currently feeling (Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 2011). To explore this idea empirically, researchers in one study had participants listen to uplifting music by Mozart or melancholy music by Mahler (Niedenthal & Setterlund, 1994). Feeling either happy or sad, participants then completed a lexical decision task, judging whether strings of letters were words or nonwords. When feeling happy, participants were faster to identify happy words (such as *delight*) than sad words (*weep*) or positive words unrelated to happiness (*calm*). When feeling sad, participants were faster to identify the sad words than the happy words or the negative words unrelated to sadness (*injury*).

Emotions can also influence broader judgments, such as our sense that our circumstances are fair or safe or that they’re unfair or dangerous. In one study conducted two months after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, participants were asked to write about how the attacks had made them either angry or frightened. Those primed to feel fear not only judged future terrorist attacks to be more likely than participants feeling anger but also reported that they themselves were more likely to be victimized by different threats, such as dying in a flu epidemic (Lerner et al., 2003). Fear can lead us to exaggerate the danger around us.

> “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.”
>
> —FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

Studies of anger also highlight the problematic influence emotions can have on perception. When we experience frustration at school or work and return to roommates and loved ones at the end of the day, we may be quicker to perceive potential affront and hostile intent in others’ actions. In one study that brings this notion to life, participants first wrote about a memory that made them feel either angry, disgusted, or sad (Baumann & DeSteno, 2010). Then they briefly viewed a photograph of a man who was holding either a gun or a neutral object. Anger, but not disgust or sadness, made participants more likely to identify the neutral object as a gun but not to misidentify the gun as a neutral object. Anger primes us to perceive threat and aggression.

ANGER AND PERCEIVED THREAT Police officers are known to experience high levels of stress, which interferes with sleep and can lead to irritability, frustration, and anger. There are some who believe that it is this anger that leads police officers to misinterpret tense encounters with civilians, sometimes leading to tragic results.

Emotions Influence Reasoning

People tend to assume that positive emotions like amusement or awe prompt simplistic or lazy thinking. Think of any highly creative person—such as Vincent van Gogh, Virginia Woolf, Toni Morrison, or Frida Kahlo—and you’ re likely to imagine that their creative acts were produced during moments of struggle, tension, and even despair.

Alice Isen (1987, 1993) argued that this view of creativity is misguided and that positive emotions prompt people to reason in ways that are flexible and creative. In her studies, Isen induced positive emotions in her participants with trivial events. She gave them little bags of candy or made sure that they would find a coin she had placed in their path. These subtle ways of making participants feel good produced striking changes in their reasoning. When given one word (such as *carpet*) and asked to generate a related word, people feeling positive emotions came up with more novel associations (*fresh* or *texture*) than did people in a neutral state, who tended to produce more common responses (such as *rug*). Participants in a good mood categorized objects in more inclusive ways, rating fringe members of categories (like *cane* or *purse* as examples of clothing) as better members of that category than did people in a neutral state, whose categories tended to be more narrowly defined. These effects of positive emotions have important social consequences. Negotiators in a positive mood, for example, are more likely to reach an optimal agreement that incorporates the interests of both sides because positive moods allow opponents to think flexibly about the positions and interests of the other side (Carnevale & Isen, 1986).

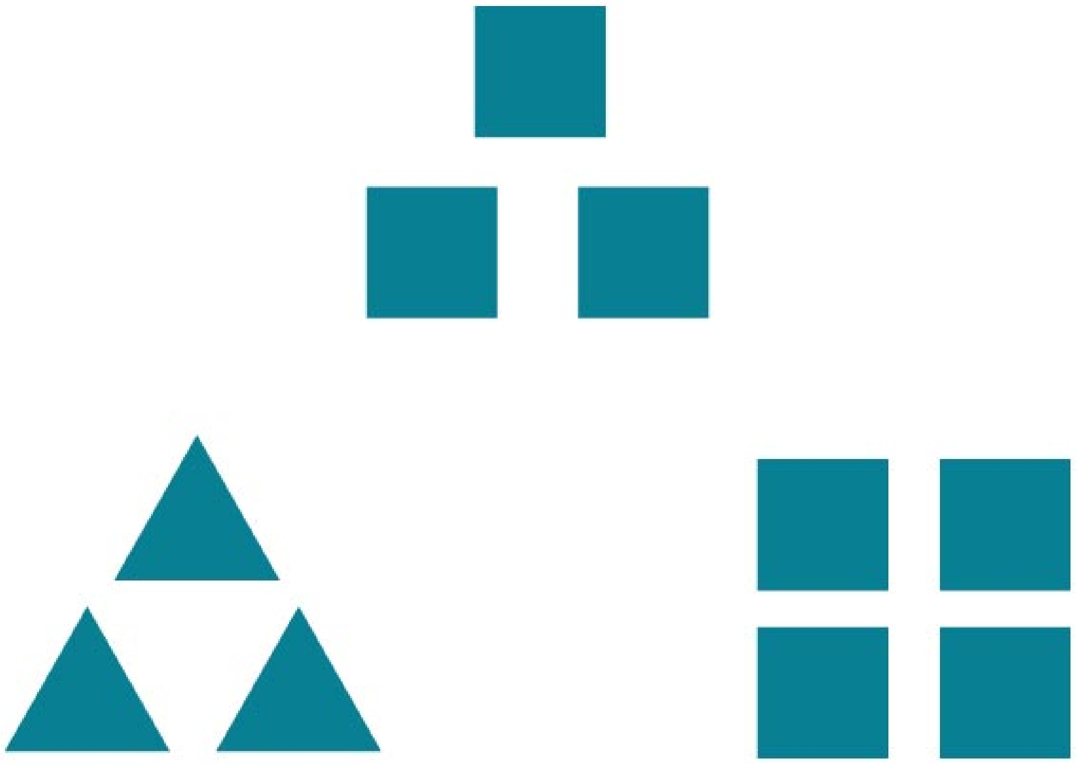


FIGURE 5.3 **GLOBAL AND LOCAL DECISION TASK** Participants feeling positive emotion tended to choose the three-triangle figure rather than the four-square figure as most resembling the three-square figure.

POSITIVE EMOTIONS BROADEN AND BUILD Inspired by these findings, Barbara Fredrickson has advanced her broaden-and-build hypothesis. Here, the central idea is that whereas negative emotions focus our attention on the narrow details of what we are perceiving, positive emotions broaden our patterns of thinking in ways that help us expand our understanding of the world and build our social relationships (Fredrickson, 2013). In research designed to test this hypothesis, participants led to feel positive emotions (for example, by watching amusing films) thought of a wider range of ways to respond to different situations than did participants feeling negative emotions or in a neutral state. When asked to pick one of two figures in the bottom row of **Figure 5.3** to match the target stimulus in the top row, participants feeling positive emotion made the less obvious choice—the one that is similar in its global arrangement (the three triangles) rather than the one that is similar in specific details (the four squares). These broadened patterns of thought extend to ways of thinking about others that build stronger ties. For example, people feeling positive emotion rate themselves as more similar to outgroup members, and they see themselves as sharing deeper similarities with their romantic partners (Fredrickson, 2001; Waugh & Fredrickson, 2006).

LOOKING BACK

Emotions prioritize certain interpretations of the environment over others and shape how we think in profound ways. Emotions influence how we perceive the world, guiding what we focus on and how we categorize the stimuli we encounter. When fearful, for example, we exaggerate the perils, risks, and uncertainties around us. Emotions also shape how we reason. Positive emotions broaden and build thought patterns, producing more creative thinking.

Glossary

broaden-and-build hypothesis

The idea that positive emotions broaden thoughts and actions, helping people build social resources.

Happiness

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Define happiness and describe some cultural variations in the way it is conceptualized.
- List some of the benefits of happiness.
- Explain why we often don’t know what makes us happy.
- List some practices that can boost our happiness.

Most readers of this book will have recently lived through one of the more radical shifts in emotion in our history: namely, the COVID pandemic and the social distancing and lockdown it required. Of the many things the pandemic disrupted, from going to school to doing our work to getting together with our friends, our emotional lives rank near the top of the list of what changed. Our ability to express emotion was transformed by masks. Our basic tendencies to express our commitments with emotion, to coordinate our actions with others, and to touch friends and form relationships were shut down by the requirements to maintain social distance and stay at home. New forms of threat and uncertainty came to color how we view our lives. For many people, young people in particular, the end result of such emotional disruption was that personal happiness suffered. One survey found that 61 percent of young adults felt seriously lonely during the pandemic (Weissbourd et al., 2021). Indeed, an analysis in *The Lancet*, a premier medical journal, found that the pandemic led to more than 50 million additional cases of major depression and more than 75 million cases of anxiety disorder worldwide, and these emotional disturbances were strongest for college-aged people (Santomauro et al., 2021).

In its second sentence, the Declaration of Independence refers to “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” as inalienable rights that all citizens should enjoy. Our pursuit of happiness was certainly compromised during the pandemic. But what exactly are we pursuing when we pursue happiness?

Cultural Variations in Happiness

Over time and across cultures, the meaning of happiness has changed (McMahon, 2006). There are more than 5,000 Indigenous societies around the world today, with cultural histories that stretch back thousands of years before European colonialism and the introduction of the written word. In many of these cultures, happiness is found in interdependence with others and a sense of reverence for nature (Pierotti, 2011).

We can also chart changes in the meaning of happiness in written history. In classical Greek times, about 2,500 years ago, happiness was thought to be achieved through virtuous behavior—being temperate, fair, kind, courageous, and dutiful (see Chapter 12). During the Middle Ages in Western Europe, a period of frequent plagues and wars, people thought that happiness was found in the afterlife, in communion with God, when the soul was liberated from the turmoil of earthly life. Philosophers of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment encouraged people to seek happiness both in hedonistic experiences and in actions that advanced the well-being of many (the idea of the greater good). As psychologists have turned their attention to the scientific study of happiness, they too have uncovered variations in its meaning. For Americans, personal achievement is an important pathway to happiness. For East Asians, happiness is found in maintaining harmonious interactions and fulfilling duties and societal expectations (Kitayama et al., 2004; Yuchida & Kitayama, 2009). For members of Latino cultures, the expression of *simpatía*, or the creation of warm, affectionate interactions, is an important pathway to happiness (A. M. Acevedo et al., 2020).

The Measurement of Happiness

Given these cultural variations, how do social psychologists approach the study of happiness? How do they define such a complex state? Psychologists maintain that there are two distinct components of happiness (Diener, 2000). The first is life satisfaction, or how well you think your life is going in general. Life satisfaction is based on evaluations of your life. It is measured with simple questionnaire items like “Overall, how satisfied are you with your life?” The second component of happiness is emotional well-being, which refers to your moment-to-moment balance of positive emotions, such as awe, gratitude, compassion, and pride, versus negative emotions, such as anger, fear, and shame.

As we venture into this relatively new scientific study of happiness, let’s first test your intuitions. A first question many people have speculated about is this: At what age are people happiest? In their youth? When middle-aged? Later in life? The robust finding across over 40 cultures is that happiness begins to fall during adolescence, reaching its low point when people are about 50 years old (Graham & Ruiz Pozuelo, 2017). From the age of 50 on, around the world, an individual’s happiness rises until the age of 75, when it plateaus and begins to fall a bit. These findings suggest our stereotypes about the joys of youth or midlife crises are wrong. It is a fairly reliable part of getting older that, starting at age 50 or so, people enjoy 20 years of their greatest happiness. There is much for you to look forward to.

Here is another question. In what country are people the happiest? This question has been addressed in the *World Happiness Report*, led by economist Jeffrey Sachs, which reports every year on the happiness of nations based on the results of large surveys. Consistently, this study finds that countries with strong safety nets—free day care, good schools, parental leave from work, care for the elderly—tend to be happier. This includes countries such as Sweden, Norway, and Finland.

A final question is this: In what social context will you feel happiest? By yourself? When enjoying a recent success at work? When out shopping? In social interactions? Time and time again, studies have found that people are happiest when they take part in meaningful social interactions with others, particularly friends and intimate partners. In one study that illustrates this central theme, Daniel Kahneman and his colleagues had participants report on what they had done that day and how their different activities influenced their emotional well-being (Kahneman et al., 2004). People were happiest when socializing with friends, spending time with their romantic partners, and relaxing. They were least happy when commuting, working, and spending time on the computer.

The Benefits of Happiness

Happiness has long been a fascinating topic that has attracted the attention of great thinkers. But does happiness matter? Should we promote happiness in schools, for example, or as part of treatment for patients in hospitals? To answer this question, Sonja Lyubomirsky, Sarah Pressman, and their colleagues have reviewed hundreds of studies of happiness as it relates to productivity at work, personal relationships, and health (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Pressman, Jenkins, & Moskowitz, 2019). Some of these studies were correlational in nature, exploring contemporaneous associations between happiness and these three life outcomes. Other studies were experiments that examined whether individuals randomly assigned to experience positive emotions compared with those in control conditions benefited in terms of productivity, relationships, and health. The conclusion from this review is that happiness matters a good deal.

A first way in which happiness matters is that it enables better work. In general, people who feel happy, or who are led to feel positive emotions, are more creative, curious, and rigorous in their thought and more productive at school and at work.

Happiness matters for your personal relationships. As you will learn in Chapter 9 on relationships and attraction, simple ways in which friends, romantic partners, and family members boost each other’s emotional well-being—for example, by expressing gratitude or sharing laughter—lead to stronger friendships, romantic partnerships, and parenting bonds.

HAPPINESS AT WORK Studies show that having healthy social relationships and meaningful work are two of the most important determinants of happiness. Having both—as do these individuals, who appear to be enjoying one another and their work—can be especially conducive to happiness.

Finally, brief moments of happiness are associated with better health. People who feel happy in general report less physical pain, better sleep, and fewer headaches. Doing things that bring about greater happiness (see A Closer Look: The Game of Happiness) has been found to lead to stronger cardiovascular and immune systems. Happiness may even increase life expectancy. One study found that nuns who reported greater happiness in the personal narratives they wrote at age 20 as they entered the convent were more likely to live into their 80s and 90s than nuns who reported being less happy in young adulthood (Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001).

Knowing a bit more about what happiness is and what its benefits are, let’s address two questions: Do we know what makes us happy? What are some of the surest ways to pursue happiness?

A CLOSER LOOK

The Game of Happiness

Among the emotions, happiness is one of the most highly valued, especially in Western societies. This premium placed on happiness extends beyond the fact that being happy simply feels good. Happiness is also associated with occupational success, better physical health, and density of social networks. Fortunately, scientists have identified various strategies that can help increase happiness. Here are ten empirically based tips that are simple and concrete enough to be implemented in the span of a single day.

Steps to happiness

You today

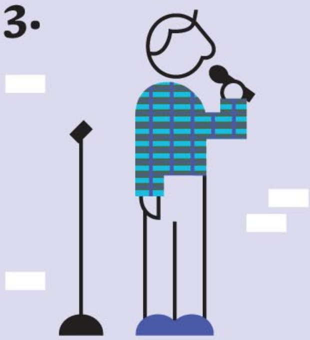
1.

Take 30 minutes and write down what you are grateful for in your life.

2.

Take a moment once a week to express your appreciation for your romantic partner or a friend, noting something specific this person does that you are grateful for.

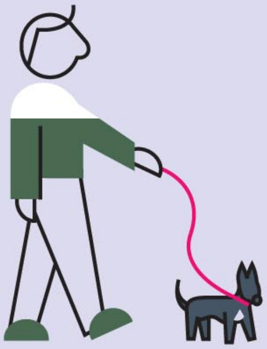
3.



Do something that makes you laugh with a friend or romantic partner—see a movie or a comedy show, share a series of funny GIFs.

4.

Go for a walk somewhere that makes you feel awe—in a great part of a city or in a natural setting.



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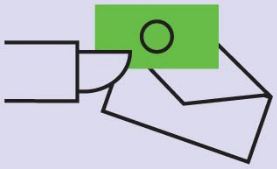
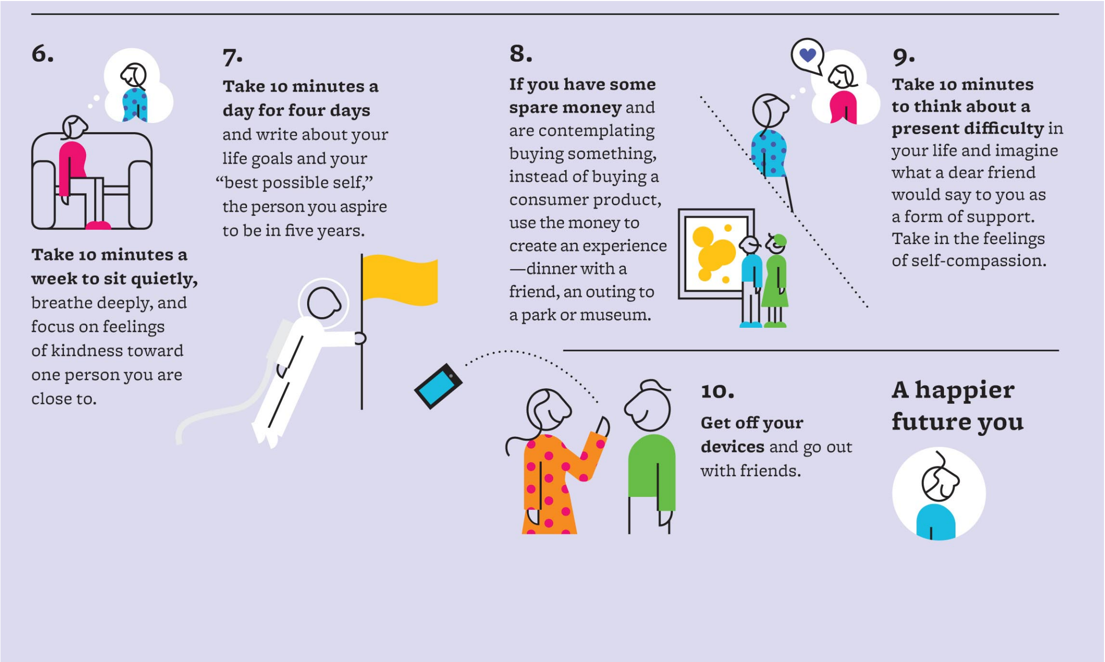


If you have $10 to spare, give it to a charity whose work is important to you.



6. **Take 10 minutes a week to sit quietly,** breathe deeply, and focus on feelings of kindness toward one person you are close to.

7. **Take 10 minutes a day for four days** and write about your life goals and your "best possible self," the person you aspire to be in five years.

8. **If you have some spare money** and are contemplating buying something, instead of buying a consumer product, use the money to create an experience—dinner with a friend, an outing to a park or museum.

9. **Take 10 minutes to think about a present difficulty** in your life and imagine what a dear friend would say to you as a form of support. Take in the feelings of self-compassion.

10. **Get off your devices** and go out with friends.

A happier future you

FOR CRITICAL THINKING

1. How many of these tips do you regularly practice? What keeps you from doing the others more frequently?
2. Before reading these ten tips, what would you have guessed makes people happy? How do your intuitions compare to what these ten tips suggest?

Knowing What Makes Us Happy

Can we reliably predict what will make us happy? One would hope so, because such predictions matter. We burn the midnight oil studying for an exam or completing an assignment at work because we assume that educational and professional success will bring sustained joy and satisfaction. We choose a career or romantic partner because we believe the one we choose will bring more happiness than those we reject. And we're often right. We know we're more likely to be happier if we have a partner who's kind rather than cruel, if we add salted caramel sauce to our ice cream rather than pickled artichoke hearts, and if we vacation in awe-inspiring Yosemite rather than war-torn Syria. But these accurate assessments aside, we' re often not as good as we imagine at predicting what will make us happy.

In their research on affective forecasting, Daniel Gilbert and Timothy Wilson have documented a variety of biases that undermine our attempts to predict what will make us happy (Gilbert et al., 2000). One study examined the expected impact of breaking up with a romantic partner and compared it with its actual impact (Gilbert et al., 1998). Students who had not experienced a romantic breakup, called "luckies," reported on their own overall happiness and then predicted how unhappy they would be two months after a breakup. The researchers compared their estimates with the happiness of people who had recently broken up, labeled "leftovers."

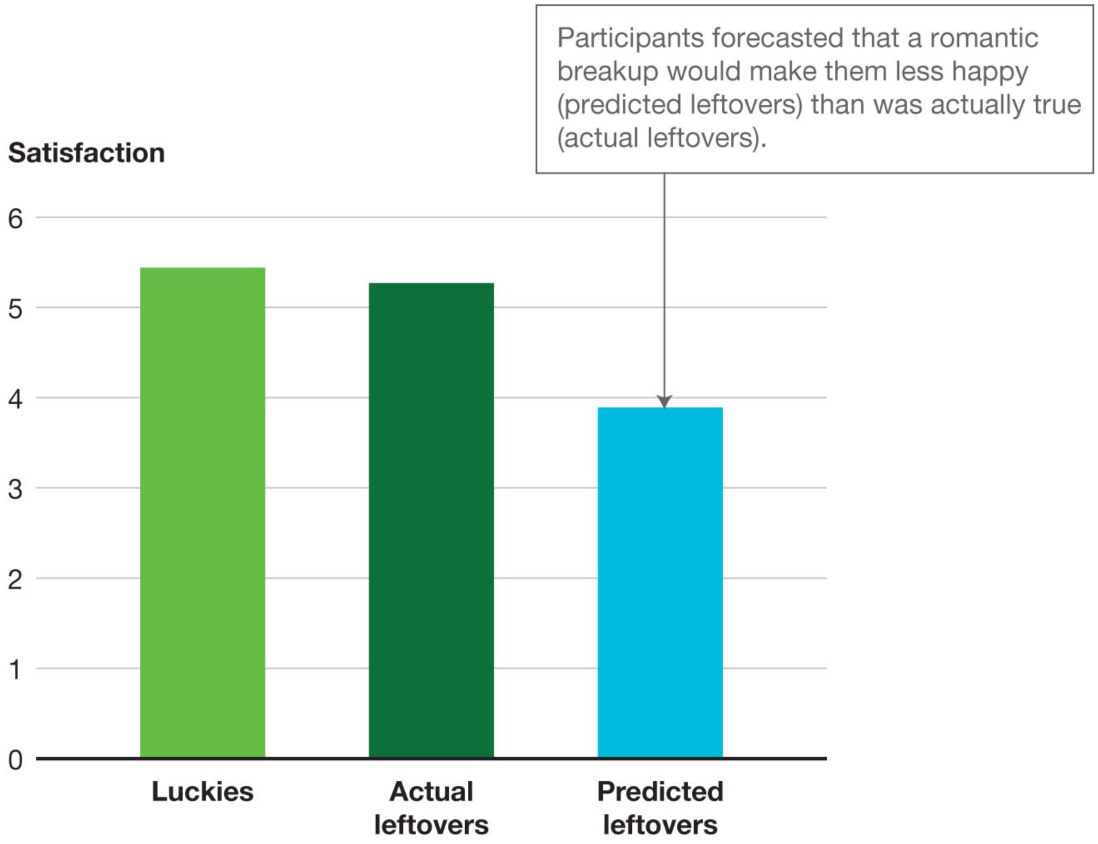


FIGURE 5.4 **DO WE KNOW WHAT MAKES US HAPPY?** This study demonstrated the accuracy of participants’ judgments of how happy they would be following a romantic breakup. The results were consistent with the researchers’ claims about biased affective forecasting. Source: Adapted from Gilbert et al., 1998.

As **Figure 5.4** shows, leftovers were almost as happy as luckies, but luckies predicted they would be much *less* happy two months after a breakup (labeled “predicted leftovers” in Figure 5.4) than actual leftovers actually were. Although some breakups are indeed devastating, people tend to overestimate how much a romantic breakup would diminish their life satisfaction down the line.

A variety of biases interfere with people’s attempts to predict their future happiness. One is immune neglect, which refers to the tendency to ignore our ability to respond productively to stress and other potential sources of unhappiness (Gilbert et al., 1998). We are often remarkably resilient in responding to painful setbacks, largely because of what Gilbert and Wilson call the “psychological immune system.” Just as our biological immune system protects us from toxins and disease, our psychological immune system protects us from psychological distress. We have a great capacity to find the silver lining, the humor, the potential for insight and growth in the face of painful and traumatic experiences. These “immune-related” processes allow us to find happiness during hard times. However, when estimating the effects of traumatic events like breakups or failures at work, we fail to consider these processes that make us resilient to stress. As a consequence, we fail to accurately predict our future happiness.

IMMUNE NEGLECT Although getting stuck in traffic jams, like this one, can certainly make us unhappy, we often underestimate how quickly we can bounce back after a stressful or frustrating experience.

> “Nothing in life is as important as you think it is at the moment you are thinking of it.”
>
> —DANIEL KAHNEMAN

Another reason people sometimes have difficulty predicting what will make them happy is a bias known as focalism: We focus too much on the most central (or “focal”) elements of significant events, such as our initial despair upon learning a romantic partner is leaving us, and we fail to consider how other aspects of our lives will influence how happy we are

(T. D. Wilson et al., 2000). We tend to assume that once a particular positive event happens—for example, getting a great apartment with friends or landing a dream job—we will be truly and enduringly happy. What we forget to consider is that after moving into that apartment or starting that career we’ve always wanted, many other events—such as financial stress, health problems in our family, conflicts with our romantic partners, or just the daily challenges of living—will also influence how happy we are.

REMEMBRANCE OF PAST PLEASURES Much as our predictions about what will make us happy in the future are sometimes biased, so too are our recollections of past pleasures. In one illustrative study, Barbara Fredrickson and Daniel Kahneman (1993) had participants watch a series of pleasurable film clips, such as a comedy routine or a puppy playing with a flower. While doing so, the participants rated the intensity of their second-by-second experience of pleasure by moving a dial back and forth. Then, after the film clips ended, they provided an overall assessment of how pleasurable it was to watch the clips. The researchers correlated these retrospective assessments with participants’ specific, moment-to-moment ratings to find out how immediate experiences of pleasure relate to people’s subsequent recollections of their level of enjoyment.

This study and others like it have documented two factors that influence recollections of pleasure—and a third that, surprisingly, has very little influence. First, the *peak moment* of pleasure during the course of an event—the most delicious bite of a dessert, the most beautiful sunset at the end of the day, the most gratifying compliment received during a family gathering—strongly predicts how much pleasure you’ll remember later. Second, how you feel at the *end* of the event also strongly predicts your overall experience of pleasure. So, try to make sure that the last few moments of a first date you’ve enjoyed are especially good. Similarly, it’s wise for a teacher to end a lecture with an inspiring conclusion, a provocative question, or a good joke. Something that has surprisingly little impact on people's subsequent overall assessments is the *length* of the pleasurable experience in question—an effect known as duration neglect. Whether a massage lasts 20 minutes or an hour or whether a first date lasts 1 hour or 10 has very little effect on our recollections of pleasure. What matters most is quality of the experience at its peak and at the end.

The Pursuit of Happiness

If people's theories about what makes them happy are sometimes misguided, what can science tell us about the most reliable contributors to happiness? What are some principles you can follow to find more happiness?

One answer may seem obvious but warrants mention: Happiness is often found in being with other people. Relationships of all kinds—romantic partnerships, friendships, family connections, neighborhood ties, and links to teammates, fellow activists, or parishioners—lift people's spirits (Lyubomirsky, 2007). Religious engagement is associated with greater happiness in part because such involvement leads to a sense of community and trust in others (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004). Social bonds bring personal happiness. This doesn't mean that you have to be around people all the time or live the life of an extravert. A few close friendships can do the trick. Just be sure to avoid isolation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

A second answer concerns money. Is it really true that "money doesn't buy happiness"? There is an enormous body of research on this question, and the evidence indicates that money will bring you some happiness (Killingsworth, 2021). This should make sense to you, since money enables you to feel less stress about handling the expenses of life and to find certain pleasures with greater ease, such as a dinner out at a nice restaurant or a weekend at a music festival. Studies indicate, though, that money may not matter as much as you might expect. In one survey of over 400,000 U.S. residents, people who made more money reported greater life satisfaction, and the poorest respondents were the least happy and the most likely to suffer from sadness, divorce, and health problems (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). Thus, this study suggests that money does matter in terms of overall satisfaction with life. But when it comes to emotional well-being, having more money is helpful only up to a point: Up to $75,000 a year, those who make more money experience more of these positive emotions and fewer of the negative ones than those who make less money. But beyond an annual salary of $75,000, there was no difference in the emotional well-being of those making more or less money. So, yes, economic stability is important to life satisfaction—but making a great deal of money does not seem to increase the quality of people's moment-to-moment emotional experience relative to making an average income.

BOX 5.4

FOCUS ON POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Nirvana in the Brain

Ever since the Buddha found enlightenment when meditating under the Bo tree 2,500 years ago, billions of people have turned to meditation to find peace and happiness. Many kinds of meditation practices have emerged out of different cultural traditions, but they share certain principles. They encourage you to mindfully slow your breathing to a steady rhythm with deep exhalations, which reduces stress-related cardiovascular arousal. Many meditation practices encourage a mindful attention to different sensations in your body. They likewise encourage a calm, nonjudgmental awareness of your thoughts and feelings. And many meditation practices encourage training the mind in loving-kindness and compassion. Here, the meditator extends warm feelings of compassion to family members, friends, loved ones, strangers, the self, and, ultimately, adversaries to encourage a more compassionate stance toward fellow human beings.

Does meditation work? Neuroscientist Richard Davidson has been seeking a rigorous answer to that question (Davidson & Begley, 2012). He began this work by studying practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism, who spend as many as 4 or 5 hours a day quietly meditating. Upon scanning the brain of one monk, he found that the monk’s resting brain showed levels of activation in regions involved in positive emotion that were literally off the charts. In another task, Davidson blasted the monk with a loud burst of white noise, which for most people activates the startle response and its fear-based brain circuitry, the strength of which is a good indicator of how stressed out the person is. The monk didn’t even blink.

These benefits can be enjoyed by most people, not just monks who have devoted their lives to the practice of meditation. In an early demonstration of this, Davidson, Jon Kabat-Zinn, and their colleagues had software engineers train in the techniques of mindfulness meditation with the aim of developing the ability to accept without judgment their thoughts and feelings and the practice of loving-kindness toward others (Davidson et al., 2003). Six weeks later, the participants showed increased activation in regions of the brain associated with greater happiness. They also showed enhanced immune function, evident in the size of the immune response in the skin when given a flu shot. In similarly motivated work, researchers have found that practicing mindfulness meditation, with a focus on being mindful of breathing and extending loving-kindness to others, boosts happiness several weeks later (Fredrickson et al., 2008). More generally, engaging in a meditation practice, even for just 10 minutes a day, tends to bring people greater calm, less stress in response to daily life, and a sense of empathy and connection with others.

MEDITATION AND HAPPINESS French Tibetan Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard practices various contemplative meditations for hours a day and, in different tests by Richard Davidson, has been shown to have a remarkably “happy” brain.

A third way to increase your happiness is to practice gratitude, which the philosopher Adam Smith believed to be key to the functioning of healthy societies. Try to appreciate from time to time the many things other people have given you, like the opportunity to learn, to do meaningful work, or to express your ideas. In one experiment, participants were randomly assigned to either write about an experience in the past or write a letter of gratitude to someone close to them (J. K. Boehm, Lyubomirsky, & Sheldon, 2011). At a one-month follow-up, participants who had written a letter of gratitude were happier than those in the control condition. And those who receive such letters tend to be much more touched and appreciative than those who write them expect (Kumar & Epley, 2018).

NATURE, HEALTH, AND WELL-BEING Walking in nature is a consistent booster of happiness, awe, and good health.

A fourth recommendation is to follow the conventional wisdom, backed up by empirical research, that it’s better to give than to receive. Elizabeth Dunn and her colleagues tested this idea by asking participants to rate how happy they were and then giving them either $5 or $20 to spend by the end of the day (E. W. Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2008). Some were told to spend the money on themselves, others to spend it on someone else. Those required to spend the money on others reported greater happiness during a follow-up assessment at the end of the day compared with those told to spend the money on themselves. This finding has since been replicated in a worldwide study involving 136 cultures (Aknin et al., 2013). To experience greater happiness, these studies indicate, we would be well served by sharing, giving to charity, volunteering, or surprising others with gifts.

You’re not likely to spend all your money on others, of course. What about the money you spend on yourself? Do some types of expenditures lead to more happiness than others? There’s an easy answer to this question, which is our fifth recommendation in the pursuit of happiness: Focus a bit more on experiences and a bit less on material possessions. The results of both consumer surveys and laboratory experiments indicate that if you’re conflicted about whether to buy a material good (an attractive coat, a 3D TV) or to finance a personal experience (tickets to a concert or a road trip to a national park), you’re generally better off opting for the experience (Gilovich & Gallo, 2020; Gilovich & Kumar, 2015). When people are asked to recall their most significant material purchase and most significant experiential purchase over the past five years, they report that the experiential purchase brought more joy, was a source of more enduring satisfaction, and was more clearly “money well spent.” Why is this so? One reason is that we quickly habituate or get used to the material good (the new smartphone is fun for a while, but soon it feels no different from the old one), but the experience lingers. It lives on in the memories we cherish, in the stories we tell, and in the very sense of who we are (T. J. Carter & Gilovich, 2012; Kumar & Gilovich, 2015).

Finally, try to cultivate experiences that can lead to awe. Research indicates that even brief experiences of awe—from, say, watching awe-inspiring films, reading stories about extraordinary experiences, being around inspiring people, or taking 10 minutes to get outdoors into natural beauty—can boost people’s happiness (Gordon et al., 2017; Rudd, Vohs, & Aaker, 2012). One reason for this boost is that awe leads to an expanded sense of time; experiences of awe make people feel less oppressed by the time crunch that is such a common element of today’s life (Rudd, Vohs, & Aaker, 2012). Brief experiences of awe also attenuate certain thoughts—especially thoughts of entitlement and the concern with material consumption—that diminish personal happiness (Piff et al., 2015). In your search for happiness, then, you may want to put down this book for a moment and take a look at the awe-inspiring things around you—the sky outside, an approaching thunderstorm, a beautiful stand of trees, the kindness and courage of people in your lives, even the strength of the materials in the building that’s keeping you warm.

LOOKING BACK

Happiness consists of both overall life satisfaction and moment-to-moment emotional well-being (or the ratio of daily positive to negative emotions). It’s sometimes hard to predict the extent of our future happiness. We tend to pay attention to certain “focal” factors while neglecting other, less focal elements that will nonetheless powerfully influence how happy we’ll be. The peak and endpoint of an experience have substantial influence on memories about our experiences, whereas sheer duration of experiences had relatively little influence. We can cultivate happiness by pursuing social connection, practicing gratitude, giving to others, focusing on experiences rather than material objects, and seeking out experiences of awe.

Glossary

affective forecasting

Predicting future emotions, such as whether an event will result in happiness, anger, or sadness and for how long.

immune neglect

The tendency for people to underestimate their capacity to be resilient in responding to difficult life events, which leads them to overestimate the extent to which life’s problems will reduce their personal well-being.

focalism

A tendency to focus too much on a central aspect of an event while neglecting the possible impact of peripheral considerations or extraneous events.

duration neglect

The relative unimportance of the length of an emotional experience, whether pleasurable or unpleasant, in retrospective assessments of the overall experience.

Chapter Review

SUMMARY

Defining Emotion

- *Emotions* are defined by their *appraisals*, experiences, expressions, and physiological patterns.
- The experience of an emotion is generally brief, lasting only seconds or minutes; moods often last for hours or days.
- Emotions guide how we perceive the world and how we act in response to challenges and opportunities in the environment.

Emotional Expression: Both Universal and Culturally Specific

- A central tension exists between evolutionary approaches to emotion, which posit that emotions are biologically based and universal, and a constructivist approach, which holds that the meaning of every facet of emotion is shaped by culturally specific words, ideas, values, and practices.
- Universal aspects to emotion are based on evolutionary factors. Emotions enable people to respond quickly and effectively to threats and opportunities related to survival.
- People in different cultures facially express happiness, surprise, sadness, anger, disgust, and fear in similar ways.

- Cultures vary in their *focal emotions*, or those that are most common in everyday experience.
- There are cultural differences in which emotions are highly valued and in tendencies toward emotion regulation strategies, such as *suppression*.

Emotions and Social Relationships

- *Social functional theory* proposes that emotions enable people to form, maintain, and negotiate the relationships that matter most, such as romantic bonds, friendships, social hierarchies, and collective and cultural identities.
- Emotions help solve the “commitment problem,” enabling people to express sincere commitment and to behave in ways that benefit others’ well-being, thus strengthening social relationships. The chemical oxytocin, when circulating throughout the blood, contributes to building commitment and trust.
- Emotional expressions in one’s face, voice, and touch trigger reactions in others, thus coordinating interactions such as flirtation or attachments between parents and children.
- The experience and expression of certain emotions, including awe, pride, envy, and anger, enable people to know their status within social groups.

Emotions and Understanding the Social World

- Emotions influence how people construe the social context. Fear, for instance, makes people more attuned to threats in the environment and perils and risks in their lives.
- The *broaden-and-build hypothesis* holds that positive emotions broaden thoughts and actions, prompting people

to see greater similarities between themselves and others and thereby building stronger relationships.

Happiness

- Happiness is described as the combination of life satisfaction and emotional well-being, the tendency to experience more positive emotions than negative emotions.
- Happiness is associated with many benefits, including stronger relationships, increased creativity, and better health.
- *Affective forecasting* involves predictions about how life events will influence happiness. People often fail to accurately predict how much an emotional experience, such as breaking up from a romantic relationship, will affect them.
- *Focalism* is narrowly focusing on how a single event will influence future happiness while not considering other events.
- People can cultivate happiness by being grateful, practicing generosity, cultivating a mindfulness practice to calm stress, and focusing on experiences rather than purchasing material goods.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Imagine a friend tells you that the human species would be better off without our capacity for emotion. How would you counter this claim? What ideas and evidence across this chapter would you reference to make the case for emotions?
2. Humans appear to have a coordinated display of embarrassment that resembles appeasement signals in other species. What does this tell us about the function of

embarrassment? Why do you feel embarrassed when you trip and fall in a full lecture hall? What effects should your display of embarrassment have on your classmates?

3. Much communication today occurs via electronic text rather than face-to-face, whether in an online chat or text message, an email, or a post on a social media site. Given what you know about the importance of emotions for social relationships, why do you think people frequently use emoticons and emojis in these communications? What social functions do they perform?
4. Suppose you just got into a huge fight with your parents on the phone and are feeling angry. You call up your romantic partner to talk about the fight, but you just end up fighting with your partner. Using what you know about emotion’s effects on perception, how would you explain this second fight?
5. Would winning several million dollars in the lottery make you happier? What does research on affective forecasting predict? What does the research on money and happiness have to say? How should you spend your winnings to maximize happiness?

The answer guidelines for the Think About It questions can be found at the back of the book . . .

ONLINE STUDY MATERIALS

Want to earn a better grade on your test?

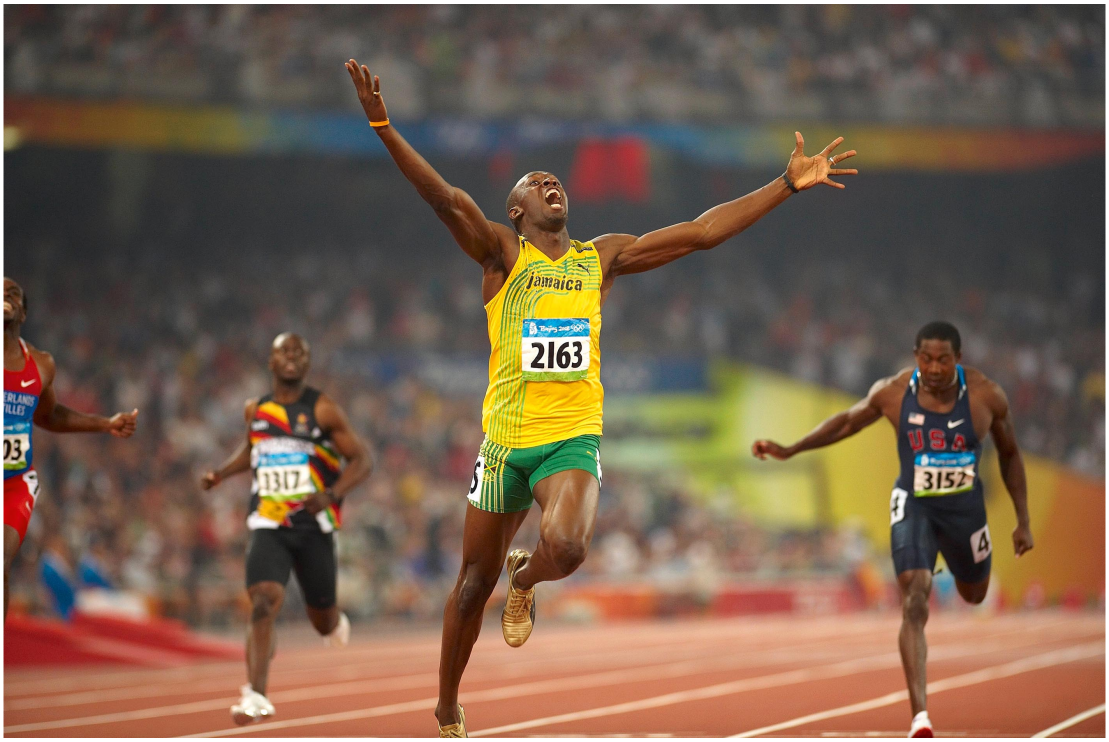
Go to INQUIZITIVE to learn and review this chapter’s content, with personalized feedback along the way.

CHAPTER
6

Attitudes, Behavior, and Rationalization

AMERICA
ONE NATION
UNDER GOD

Why were Americans more patriotic after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center?



What can someone’s bodily movements tell us about their emotions?

I wear a mask:
to save lives.
#MaskUpDE
de.gov/coronavirus

How can we convince other people to change their behavior?

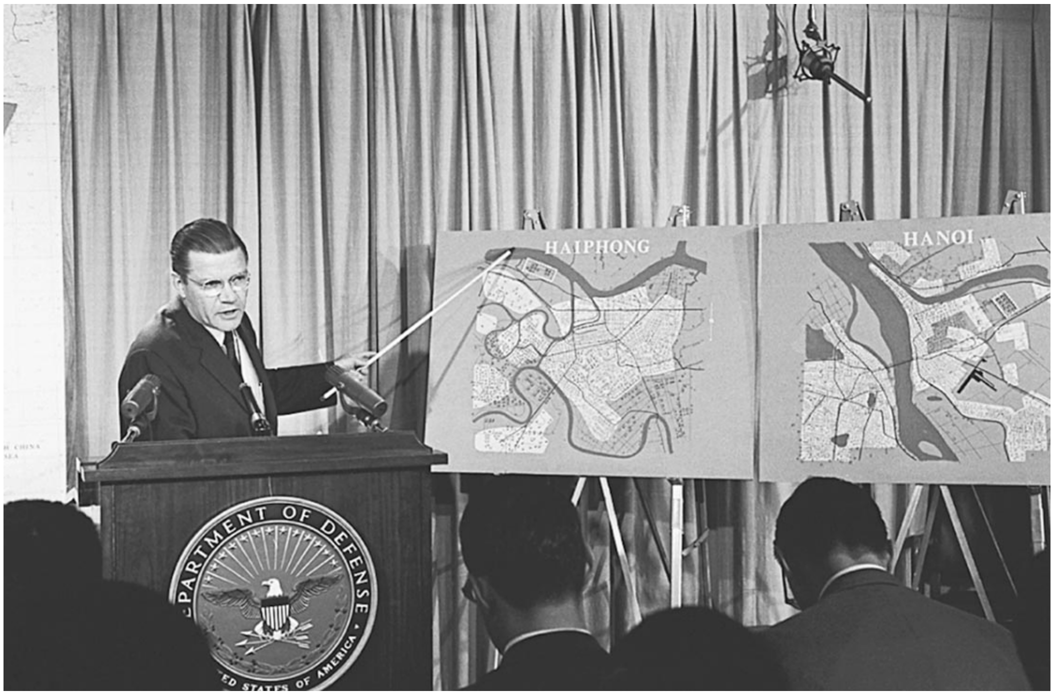
OUTLINE

- Components and Measurement of Attitudes
- Predicting Behavior From Attitudes
- Predicting Attitudes From Behavior
- Self-Perception Theory
- Beyond Cognitive Consistency to Broader Rationalization

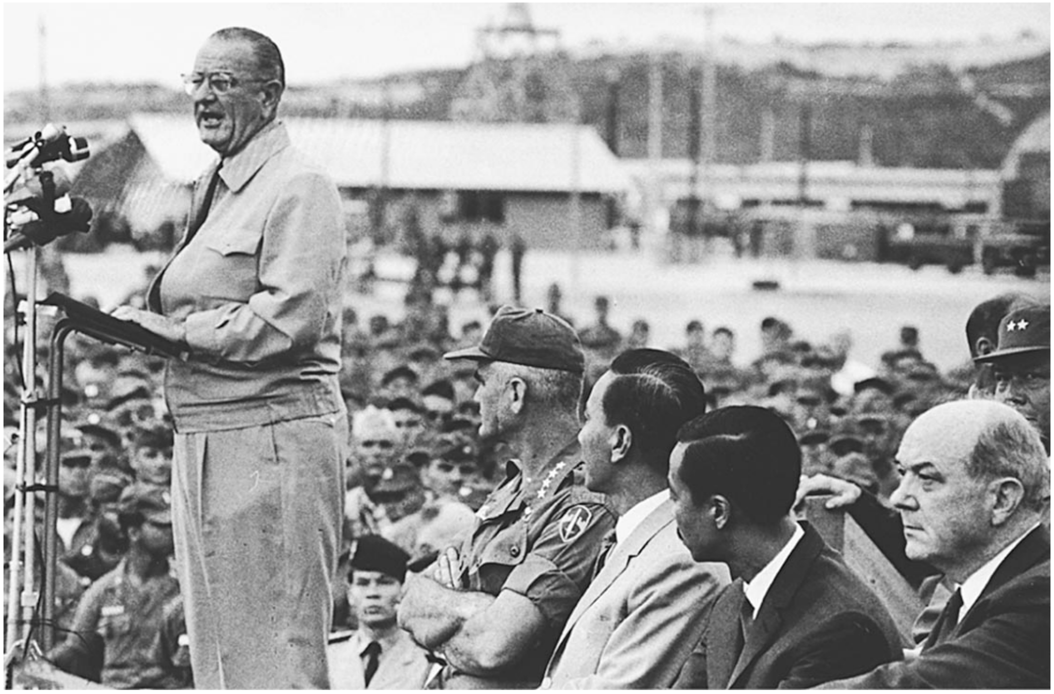
THROUGHOUT AMERICA’S LONG AND PAINFUL military involvement in Vietnam—a conflict that split the United States into “hawks” and “doves,” consumed the energies of three administrations, and ultimately cost the lives of 58,000 U.S. soldiers—the government put a positive spin on the enterprise. But despite the government’s optimistic pronouncements about the war effort, many public officials had doubts. Their reservations often surfaced when key decisions needed to be made, such as whether to increase the number of U.S. soldiers stationed in South Vietnam or whether to initiate a bombing campaign against North Vietnam.

Lyndon Johnson, the U.S. president responsible for the largest buildup of American troops in Vietnam, used an interesting tactic to deal with those in his administration who privately expressed such reservations (Halberstam, 1969). Johnson would send the doubters on a “fact-finding” mission to Vietnam, nearly always accompanied by a group of reporters. This might seem like a risky move on Johnson’s part, because if any of these doubters revealed their concerns to the press, the administration’s policies would be undermined. Johnson knew, however, that they wouldn’t expose their dissent publicly, and, moreover, when confronted by reporters’ criticisms of the war, they would actually be put in the position of publicly *defending* administration policy. This public endorsement, Johnson reasoned, would serve to lessen their doubts and help transform them into advocates. Known as an unusually savvy politician, Johnson was using some very clever psychology—psychology we’ll explore in this chapter—to win support for his Vietnam policy.

Johnson’s strategy highlights some important questions about the consistency between attitudes and behavior, especially whether this consistency is the result of attitudes influencing behavior or behavior influencing attitudes. Attitudes do influence behavior: People with strong pro-environment attitudes are more likely to vote Green or Democratic than Republican. But behavior influences attitudes as well: Environmentally minded individuals who drive gas-guzzling cars tend to convince themselves that automobile exhaust contributes relatively little to air pollution or global warming—or that they don’t drive that much anyway.


HAIPHONG
HANOI
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

(A)



(B)

PUBLIC ADVOCACY AND PRIVATE ACCEPTANCE Despite continuing problems in fighting the Vietnam War, U.S. president Lyndon Johnson publicly declared that things were going well and insisted that his advisers and cabinet members publicly express their support and confidence. (A) U.S. secretary of defense Robert McNamara had reservations about the war that may have been alleviated by the constant need to defend it. Here, he is shown briefing the press on U.S. air attacks. (B) To bolster morale, Johnson himself spoke to American troops in South Vietnam while U.S. general William Westmoreland, South Vietnamese general Nguyen Van Thieu, South Vietnamese premier Nguyen Coo Ky, and U.S. secretary of state Dean Rusk looked on.

Which is stronger: the effect of attitudes on behavior or the effect of behavior on attitudes? It’s a difficult question to answer, but decades of research on the topic have shown that the influence of attitudes on behavior is a bit weaker than most people suspect, and the influence of behavior on attitudes is much stronger than most suspect. So President Johnson was right: Get skeptics to publicly endorse the policy, and there’s a good chance they will be skeptics no longer.

This chapter examines what social psychologists have learned about the consistency between attitudes and behavior. The chapter also examines two “consistency theories” that explain why people tend to maintain consistency among their attitudes and between their attitudes and behavior. ■

Components and Measurement of Attitudes

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Explain what an attitude is, including its different components.
- Identify the various ways that attitudes can be assessed.

Let’s start with the basics: What are attitudes, and how are they measured? Attitudes can have multiple components, and researchers use a variety of methods to measure them.

Three Components of Attitudes

An attitude is an evaluation of an object along a positive-negative dimension. At their core, then, attitudes involve *affect* (emotion)—how much someone likes or dislikes an object, be it a politician, a landscape, an athletic shoe, a dessert, or oneself. Nearly every object triggers some degree of positive or negative emotion, which constitutes the affective component of one’s attitude toward it (Bargh et al., 1996; Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994; Fazio et al., 1986; Zanna & Rempel, 1988).

OBJECTS TRIGGER EMOTIONS Like most objects, this image of a tropical beach likely triggers some degree of emotion—presumably positive emotion for most of us.

But attitudes also involve *cognitions*—thoughts that typically reinforce a person's feelings (Breckler, 1984; Eagly & Chaiken, 1998; Zimbardo & Leippe, 1991). These include knowledge and beliefs about the object as well as associated memories and images. Your attitude about a favorite city, for example, includes knowledge about its history and its most appealing neighborhoods and landmarks, as well as the special times you've spent there.

Finally, attitudes are associated with specific *behaviors* (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Generally, the affective evaluation of good versus bad is connected to a behavioral tendency to either approach or avoid (Harmon-Jones, Price, & Harmon-Jones, 2015). Put differently, attitudes alert us to rewarding objects we should approach and to costly or punishing objects we should avoid (M. J. Ferguson & Bargh, 2008; M. J. Ferguson & Zayas, 2009). When specific attitudes are primed—brought to mind, even nonconsciously—people are more likely to behave in ways consistent with the attitude (M. Chen & Bargh, 1999). Neuroscientific studies indicate that our attitudes activate particular areas of the brain's motor cortex that support specific actions (McCall et al., 2012; S. D. Preston & de Waal, 2002). When you see a young child crying or a scrumptious hot fudge sundae, your mind prepares your body for the action of caretaking or consumption.

Measuring Attitudes

Attitudes are most commonly assessed through simple self-report measures, such as survey questions. When researchers want to know how participants feel about members of other groups, their romantic partners, public figures, and so on, they usually just ask them. To do so, they often rely on a Likert scale, named after psychologist Rensis Likert, its inventor. A Likert scale lists a set of possible answers with anchors on each extreme—for example, 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*. To assess attitudes toward cell phone use while driving, for example, researchers might have participants respond on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is the least favorable answer (*It's never acceptable*) and 7 is the most favorable (*It's always acceptable*). You've probably responded to many of these kinds of queries. Yet when it comes to many complex attitudes—such as your attitude toward capital punishment, the Black Lives Matter movement, or hedge fund managers—responses to these sorts of simple scales are likely to miss some important elements.

Consider the following questions: How much do you value freedom? How strongly do you feel about the need to reduce discrimination? How important is a less polluted environment? If an investigator asked these questions of a random selection of individuals, chances are that most of their responses on a Likert scale would be very positive. But surely people differ in the strength and depth of their attitudes toward these issues—differences that may not be captured by their Likert-scale responses. How can social psychologists better capture these other dimensions of attitudes?

BOX 6.1

FOCUS ON NEUROSCIENCE

Is the Bad Stronger Than the Good?

At the core of our attitudes is a positive or negative response to an object—an old friend’s voice, a roommate’s messy pile of dishes, the smell of freshly cut grass. Pioneering research by neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux found that one part of the brain, the amygdala, is central to this initial, core component of our attitudes (LeDoux, 1989, 1993, 1996). After receiving sensory information about a stimulus from the thalamus, the almond-shaped amygdala then provides information about the positive or negative valence, or value, of the object. This evaluation occurs, remarkably, before the mind has categorized the object in question. Thus, even before we fully know what an object is, we have a gut feeling about it. When the amygdala is damaged, animals no longer evaluate objects appropriately: They eat feces, attempt to copulate with members of other species, and show no fear of threatening stimuli such as snakes or dominant animals.

LeDoux’s research raises an interesting question: Are our quick positive and negative evaluations of stimuli comparable with respect to their strength? Reviews by Shelley Taylor (1991), Paul Rozin and Edward Royzman (2001), Roy Baumeister and his colleagues (2001), and John Cacioppo and Wendi Gardner (1999) have all yielded the same answer: Negative evaluations are stronger than positive evaluations. It would certainly make evolutionary sense for an organism to be more vigilant about avoiding harm than seeking pleasure, to be more watchful for danger signs than for cues to opportunity. Food or mating opportunities not pursued today might be realized tomorrow, but if a predator is not avoided today, there is no tomorrow. A pronounced negativity bias might therefore increase the chances of survival.

Consider a few generalizations supporting the conclusion that the bad is stronger than the good. Negative stimuli, such as frightening sounds or noxious smells, elicit faster and stronger physiological responses than do positive stimuli, such as delicious tastes. Losing $20 is more painful than winning $20 is pleasurable. Trauma, such as the death of a loved one or sexual abuse, can change a person for a lifetime; positive events are less likely to have equivalent effects. Or consider Rozin’s observation about contamination: The briefest contact with a cockroach will spoil a delicious meal, but the inverse—making a pile of cockroaches delicious by spicing it up with your favorite foods—is unimaginable (Rozin & Royzman, 2001).

In related work, Tiffany Ito, John Cacioppo, and their colleagues (1998) presented participants with positively valenced pictures (e.g., of a pizza or a bowl of chocolate ice cream) and negatively valenced pictures (e.g., of a mutilated face or a dead cat). As they did so, they recorded the participants' brain activity with a focus on brain regions known to be involved in evaluative responses to stimuli. They discovered a clear negativity bias in evaluation: The negative stimuli generated greater brain activity than the positive or neutral stimuli. The bad is indeed stronger than the good.

CONTAMINATION The presence of cockroaches on food spoils a delicious meal. (Note that the meal does not make the cockroaches suddenly seem appetizing.)

One approach is to measure the *accessibility* of the attitude—that is, how readily it comes to mind (Fazio, 1995; Fazio & Williams, 1986). To do so, researchers track the time it takes a person to respond to an attitude question—known as the person's response latency. Someone who takes less than a second to respond affirmatively to a question such as "Do you approve of how the president is handling the COVID-19 pandemic?” is likely to have a stronger attitude on this topic than somebody who takes several seconds to respond. In a study conducted five months before Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale squared off in the 1984 U.S. presidential election, for example, Russell Fazio and Carol Williams (1986) measured how long it took participants to indicate their attitude toward Reagan. Those who responded quickly to the attitude question showed greater consistency between their attitude and their ultimate vote choice compared with those who responded relatively slowly.

Another way to assess the strength and importance of someone’s attitude is to determine the *centrality* of the attitude to the person’s belief system (Krosnick & Petty, 1995). To evaluate attitude centrality, researchers measure a variety of attitudes within a domain and calculate how strongly each one is linked to the others. To illustrate, a researcher might ask your opinions about abortion, stem cell research, fracking, same-sex marriage, sex education in high school, drug legalization, and taxation. If your attitude on a specific topic is very important to you, it should be consistent with your attitudes about certain other issues. For example, if abortion is a defining issue for you, then your view on abortion is likely to be strongly correlated with your attitudes about stem cell research and sex education and perhaps even with your attitudes about same-sex marriage and taxation.

Other ways of measuring attitudes don’t rely on explicit self-reports. Investigators often use implicit attitude measures when there is reason to believe that people may be unwilling or unable to report their true feelings or opinions (C. D. Cameron, Brown-Iannuzzi, & Payne, 2012). Chapter 10, on stereotypes and prejudice, discusses in some detail two widely used implicit measures: affective priming and the implicit association test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). With both of these measures, people may not even realize that their attitudes are being examined, and even if they do, they are expressing their attitudes through processes that are difficult or impossible for them to control. Broadly speaking, this is because these measures don’t try to tap attitudes about the object in question (e.g., a gun) directly. Instead, they look at associations between the attitude object and positive versus negative stimuli (e.g., flowers versus vomit). If people’s responses indicate that they associate guns with positive stimuli more readily than with negative stimuli, this suggests a more favorable attitude toward guns. Implicit measures let researchers tap *nonconscious attitudes*—that is, people’s immediate evaluative reactions that they may not be aware of or that may conflict with their consciously endorsed attitudes. Researchers also sometimes use nonverbal measures, such as degree of physical closeness (e.g., how close people choose to sit to members of another group), as signals of attitudes toward others (with greater closeness corresponding to more positive attitudes).

Finally, physiological indicators, such as the increased heart rate and sweaty palms associated with fear, can reveal people’s attitudes. Box 6.1, for example, describes how patterns of brain activity recorded from the surface of the scalp reflect the relative strength of positive and negative attitudes (Ito et al., 1998).

LOOKING BACK

Attitudes can have three components: affect, cognition, and behavior. Researchers have developed many ways to measure attitudes, including explicit self-reports, implicit indices, and physiological measures.

Glossary

attitude

An evaluation of an object in a positive or negative fashion that includes three components: affect, cognition, and behavior.

Likert scale

A numerical scale used to assess people’s attitudes; a scale that includes a set of possible answers with labeled anchors on each extreme.

response latency

The amount of time it takes to respond to a stimulus, such as an attitude question.

implicit attitude measure

An indirect measure of attitudes that doesn’t involve a self-report.

Predicting Behavior From Attitudes

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify reasons why attitudes might not always predict behavior.
- Describe the conditions in which attitudes and behavior are most likely to be aligned.

Most academic discussions of how well attitudes predict behavior begin with a remarkable study conducted by the sociologist Richard LaPiere in the early 1930s (LaPiere, 1934). LaPiere spent two years touring the United States with a young Chinese couple, visiting numerous hotels, campgrounds, restaurants, and cafés. Although prejudice and discrimination against Chinese individuals were common at the time, LaPiere and his traveling companions were denied service by only one of the 250 establishments they visited, leading LaPiere to wonder if maybe anti-Chinese prejudice wasn’t so strong after all.

TRUMP
PENCE
KEEP AMERICA GREAT!
2020
WE DISAGREE
BUT WE STILL
GET ALONG
BIDEN
HARRIS
2020

ATTITUDES DON'T ALWAYS PREDICT BEHAVIOR The homeowner on the left clearly held strong attitudes in favor of 2020 presidential candidate Donald Trump and against his competitor, Joe Biden. Here we see the owner talking pleasantly with a neighbor (on the right) who was a staunch Democratic supporter. Though this neighbor may hold negative attitudes against Trump supporters in general, his specific attitude toward his Trump-supporting neighbor, with whom he's been friendly for a long time, is a different matter.

To find out, LaPiere wrote to all of the establishments they had visited and asked whether their policy was to serve people of the "Chinese race." About 90 percent of the respondents said they wouldn't—a figure stunningly inconsistent with what LaPiere had actually experienced during his earlier tour. This result was unfortunate in human terms because it indicated that anti-Chinese prejudice was indeed rather robust. But it was also unfortunate from the perspective of psychological science because it suggested that attitudes don't predict behavior very well. To a scientific discipline that had treated attitudes as powerful determinants of people’s behavior, this news was surprising —and rather unsettling.

Note that this inconsistency wasn’t some fluke. Many studies conducted over the next several decades yielded similar results. As an often-cited 1969 review of the literature on attitudes and behavior concluded: “The present review provides little evidence to support the postulated existence of stable, underlying attitudes within the individual which influence both his verbal expressions and his actions” (Wicker, 1969, p. 75).

Most people find this result surprising because everyday life provides plenty of evidence that attitudes and behavior often *do* go together. People with anti-abortion attitudes are the ones who picket abortion clinics. People who have positive attitudes toward bowling show up at the local bowling alley on the weekend. Adults with favorable attitudes toward kids usually decide to have children. People who trust the science indicating that mask wearing is an effective strategy for minimizing the spread of COVID-19 adhere to mask-wearing guidelines. Evidence of a tight connection between attitudes and behavior is all around us. But such evidence indicates only that if people behave a certain way, then they probably have positive feelings about that behavior. It doesn’t mean that those with a positive attitude toward a given behavior will necessarily behave in a manner consistent with that attitude. What’s not so obvious in everyday life are the many instances of, say, people with positive attitudes about bowling who don’t bowl or people with favorable attitudes about kids who don’t have children.

There are many reasons why we don’t act on our attitudes. And once we’re aware of those reasons, the finding that attitudes often fail to predict behavior may no longer seem so surprising. Furthermore, an awareness of these reasons gives us a better understanding of the circumstances in which attitudes are likely to predict behavior (Bechler, Tormala, & Rucker, 2021; Glasman & Albarracín, 2006; Kruglanski et al., 2015).

Attitudes Can Conflict With Other Powerful Determinants of Behavior

> “I do not like thee, Dr. Fell. The reason why I cannot tell. But this I know and know full well. I do not like thee, Dr. Fell.”
>
> —NURSERY RHYME WRITTEN IN 1680 BY SATIRIC POET TOM BROWN

Think about the relationship between attitudes about dieting and actual success in sticking to a diet. Would you expect a strong relationship? Probably not. Whether or not people stick with a diet plan is determined by so much more than their attitudes toward dieting, including their eating habits, individual physiology, and whether they happen to be around friends pigging out at the moment—not to mention their attitudes about things like ice cream, doughnuts, and french fries. What’s true about attitudes toward dieting is true about attitudes in general. They all compete with other determinants of behavior. The situationist message of social psychology (and of this book) suggests that attitudes don’t always win out over these other determinants, so attitudes aren’t always tightly connected to behavior.

INCONSISTENT ATTITUDES Attitudes may not be good predictors of behavior because people often have attitudes that conflict with one another. Many people are in favor of the notion of having a designated driver and believe it’s wrong to drive under the influence. But many people also have a favorable attitude toward drinking and having fun with friends, and they prefer not to spoil others’ fun by monitoring or curtailing their drinking. These conflicts can lead to behavior that does not reflect one of the attitudes.

One potent determinant of behavior that can weaken the relationship between attitudes and actions is a person’s understanding of prevailing norms. In a movie theater, for instance, you might be dying to share your hilarious commentary about the movie with the person next to you, but let’s hope you refrain from doing so because you recognize that it just isn’t done and that others—probably including the person next to you!—would disapprove. Similarly, the hotel and restaurant owners in LaPiere’s study may have wanted to turn away the Chinese couple, but they refrained from doing so out of concern for how it would look and the scene it might cause.

Introspecting About the Reasons for Our Attitudes

Consider your attitude toward someone you’re attracted to. Why are you attracted to this person? A number of answers likely spring to mind: “He’s fun to be with”; “They’re ambitious”; “She’s cute.” Sometimes, however, it’s not so easy to know exactly why we like someone. It may not be because of specific, readily identifiable attributes; we may simply share some indescribable chemistry. Suppose this is the case, and you’re asked to come up with reasons why you like someone. Like most people, you’ll probably focus on what is easy to identify, easy to justify, and easy to capture in words—and thus miss the real, but hard-to-articulate, reasons for your attraction. Why does this matter? It turns out that coming up with the (wrong) reasons for an attitude you have can mislead you about what your attitude actually is.

In one test of this phenomenon, Timothy Wilson and his colleagues asked students about the person they were dating. Participants in one group simply gave an overall evaluation of their relationship. Those in another group listed the reasons they felt the way they did and then gave an overall relationship evaluation. The researchers followed up with the participants nine months later and asked about the status of their relationship. The attitudes of participants in the first group, who evaluated their relationships without considering their reasons, were much more accurate predictors of their current relationship status than were the attitudes of participants who had introspected about their reasons for liking their partner (T. D. Wilson et al., 1984). Thinking about why we like someone can mislead us in terms of our true, full attitude toward that person, with the result that the attitude we report after generating reasons is not a very good predictor of our subsequent behavior.

Wilson has found that introspecting about the reasons for our attitudes about all sorts of things can undermine how well those attitudes guide our behavior. The cause in all cases is the same: Introspection may lead us to focus on the easiest-to-identify reasons for liking or disliking something at the expense of the *real* reasons for our likes and dislikes.

Does this mean that introspection is always (or even typically) misleading? Should we always just go with our gut? Not at all. In deciding whether to launch a military campaign, for example, it’s imperative for analysts to exhaustively consider the reasons for and against it. Also, the real reasons for our attitudes are sometimes perfectly easy to identify and articulate, and in those cases, introspection produces no rift between the things we *think* are guiding us and those that actually are. The contaminating effect of introspection is limited to those times when the true source of our attitude is hard to pin down, such as when the basis of an attitude is largely affective (emotional). In such cases, a thoughtful analysis is likely to seize on seemingly plausible but misleading cognitive reasons. When the basis of an attitude is primarily cognitive, however, the search for reasons tends to yield the real reasons, and introspection isn’t likely to mislead us about our true attitude or diminish the relationship between our attitude and behavior (Millar & Tesser, 1986; T. D. Wilson & Dunn, 1986). Thus, examining your reasons for enjoying a certain artist’s work may cause a rift between your expressed attitude and your subsequent behavior, but analyzing why you prefer one smartphone over another probably won’t create such a gap.

The Mismatch Between General Attitudes and Specific Targets

People typically express attitudes in terms of general categories, such as the environment, pushy people, Mexican food, or global trade. But the attitude-relevant behavior that researchers usually assess has a more specific focus: donating to Greenpeace, reacting to a specific pushy individual, ordering chicken enchiladas, or picketing a meeting of the World Trade Organization. Given this mismatch between general attitudes and specific behaviors, no wonder attitudes don’t always predict behavior particularly well.

Studies have shown that highly specific attitudes tend to do a better job of predicting specific behaviors, and general attitudes typically do a better job of predicting how a person behaves “in general” (Ajzen, 1987). In LaPiere’s study, for example, the attitudes expressed by the various merchants were rather general: whether they would serve people of the Chinese race. But the behavior assessed was directed at one specific Chinese couple with a specific demeanor and dressed in a specific fashion. Perhaps the results would have been different if LaPiere had asked the merchants whether they would serve a well-dressed, pleasant Chinese couple. If you want to predict a specific type of behavior accurately, you have to measure people’s attitudes toward that specific behavior.

GREEN
AIN
I'M W
H
STOP DESTROYING OUR PLANET
PROTECT OUR FUTURE
MATTE
PHYSICS
GEOGRAPHY
ABC
LINGUISTICS
f(x)=
MATHEMATICS
QUANTUM MECHANICS
THEOLOGY
SCIENCE
MEDICINE
GENETICS
is the key
to our future
ARCHAEOLOGY
LOGIC
BOTANY
CHEMISTRY
ARTS
PSYCHOLOGY
ASTRONOMY
GEOLOGY

GENERAL ATTITUDES AND SPECIFIC TARGETS A person with a generally positive attitude about science may not participate in rallies and marches associated with the March for Science movement that was launched in 2017. But someone with more specific attitudes about the importance of science to the health and well-being of the world’s population is more likely to join in a rally, like this person marching in Washington, D.C.

The broader point here is that people’s attitudes toward different classes of people, places, things, and events are often expressions of attitudes about a prototypical example of a given category. So, if we encounter a specific situation or person who doesn’t fit our prototype for such situations or people, our behavior probably won’t reflect our stated attitude because our general attitude doesn’t apply to *that* particular situation or person. Consider a study in which male college students expressed their attitudes about gay men (Lord, Lepper, & Mackie, 1984). The researchers also elicited from each student his stereotype of the “typical” gay man. Two months later, a different experimenter asked the participants if they would be willing to show some visiting students around campus. One of the visitors, “John B.,” was described in a way meant to lead the participants to assume he was gay. For half the participants, the rest of the description of John B. was crafted to fit their own individualized stereotype of a gay man; for the other half, it wasn’t. The investigators found that the students’ willingness to show John B. around campus—their behavior—was strongly predicted by their attitudes about gay men (those with positive attitudes said they were willing; those with negative attitudes said they were not), but only if John B. matched their prototype of a gay person. If John B. didn’t fit their image of a gay man, their attitudes about gay people didn’t predict their behavior (their willingness to show him around campus).

LOOKING BACK

Attitudes can be surprisingly weak predictors of behavior. Attitudes sometimes conflict with social norms about appropriate behavior. Examining the reasons for our attitudes can cause confusion about our true feelings. General attitudes sometimes don’t correspond to the specific action being predicted in a given situation.

Predicting Attitudes From Behavior

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Summarize the core tenets of cognitive dissonance theory and some of the factors that make the experience of dissonance more likely.
- Explain the potential role of self-esteem in cognitive dissonance.
- Discuss whether dissonance is experienced in the same way and with similar frequency across cultures.

Many young people resent being sent to church, temple, mosque, or other religious services and often complain, “Why do I have to go? I don’t believe any of this stuff.” Many of them are told, “It doesn’t matter if you believe it. What’s important is that you continue with your studies and your prayers.” Some resist to the very end and abandon all religious rituals and practices the minute their parents give them permission to opt out. But a remarkable number stick with it and eventually find themselves genuinely holding some of the religious convictions they once resisted. Over time, mere outward behavior can give way to genuine belief.

BEHAVIOR CAN INFLUENCE ATTITUDES Many people who consider themselves environmentalists nonetheless drive gas-guzzling SUVs. Driving a vehicle that isn't fuel efficient can lead those who are concerned about the environment to convince themselves that there isn't much connection between fuel efficiency and air pollution or climate change.

The previous section presented the first part of the story about the connection between attitudes and behavior: Attitudes can predict behavior, but not as strongly as most people suspect. The second part of the story, as illustrated by the religion example, is that behavior can powerfully influence attitudes. Social psychology research over the past half century has repeatedly shown that people tend to bring their attitudes in line with their actions. How is it that our behavior has such a strong influence on our attitudes? A number of important theories seek to explain this relationship. Referred to collectively as *cognitive consistency theories*, they maintain that the impact of behavior on attitudes reflects our powerful tendency to justify or rationalize our behavior and to minimize any inconsistencies between our attitudes and actions. We focus here on the most influential of these theories: cognitive dissonance theory.

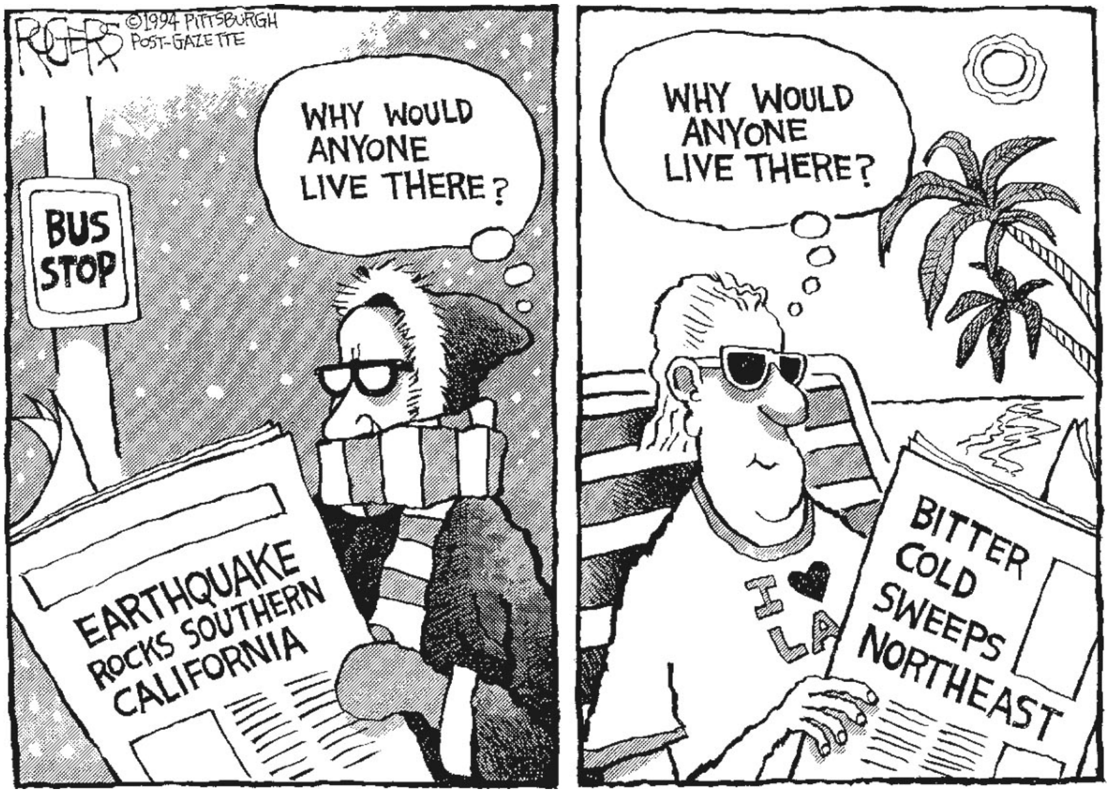
Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Leon Festinger’s cognitive dissonance theory is one of the most significant theories in the history of social psychology (Festinger, 1957). Festinger maintained that people are troubled by inconsistency among their thoughts, sentiments, and actions and that they will expend psychological energy to restore consistency. More specifically, he argued that an aversive emotional state—dissonance—is aroused whenever people experience inconsistency between two cognitions. And when the cognitions are about one’s own behavior (“I just failed to live up to my promise”), the inconsistency between cognitions and behavior is troubling as well. This unpleasant emotional state motivates efforts to restore consistency—typically by changing the cognition to make it more consistent with the behavior.

LEON FESTINGER In studying how people bring their attitudes in line with their behavior, Leon Festinger developed cognitive dissonance theory.

What constitutes cognitive inconsistency, and under what conditions does it arise? What are the different ways that people try to get rid of inconsistency? Festinger’s theory has inspired a tremendous amount of research aimed at answering such questions. To get a better sense of the kinds of inconsistency people find troubling, as well as a flavor for the diverse phenomena that cognitive dissonance theory can explain, let’s look at some of the classic experiments on the subject.

DECISIONS AND DISSONANCE A mere moment’s reflection tells us that all hard decisions cause some feelings of dissonance. Because the decision is hard, the rejected alternative must have some desirable features, the chosen alternative must have some undesirable features—or both. Because these elements are inconsistent with the decision made, the result is dissonance (Brehm, 1956). If you move to Los Angeles from a small town in the Midwest in pursuit of good weather, you’ll enjoy the sun, but the hours spent in traffic will probably produce dissonance. According to Festinger, once you’ve made an irrevocable decision to move to L.A., you’ll try to reduce this dissonance. You’ll rationalize. You’ll tell yourself and your friends how much you’ve learned from the audiobooks you play in your car during your long commute.


ROGERS ©1994 PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE
BUS STOP
WHY WOULD ANYONE LIVE THERE?
EARTHQUAKE ROCKS SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
WHY WOULD ANYONE LIVE THERE?
I ♥ LA
BITTER COLD SWEEPS NORTHEAST

Many experiments have documented this tendency to rationalize decisions. In one study, researchers interviewed bettors at a racetrack, some just before and some just after placing their bets (Knox & Inkster, 1968). The investigators reasoned that the act of placing a bet and irrevocably choosing a particular horse would cause the bettors to reduce the dissonance associated with the chosen horse's negative features (doesn't do well on a wet track) and the competing horses' positive features (the perfect distance for one horse, the best jockey on another). Dissonance reduction should be reflected in greater confidence on the part of those interviewed right *after* placing their bets, once rationalization has set in. Indeed, bettors who were interviewed right before they placed their bets gave their horses, on average, a "fair" chance of winning; those interviewed after they had placed their bets gave their horses, on average, a "good" chance to win. One participant provided some extra commentary that illustrates the process of dissonance reduction especially well. Having been interviewed while waiting in line (before placing his bet), he approached another member of the research team after placing his bet and said:

> Are you working with that other fellow there? Well, I just told him that my horse had a fair chance of winning. Will you have him change that to a good chance? No, by God, make that an excellent chance.

Wagering Windows

RATIONALIZING DECISIONS, REDUCING DISSONANCE After placing a bet at the track, as here at the Kentucky Derby, people are likely to concentrate on the positive features of the horse they chose and to downplay any negatives. This rationalization process gives them greater confidence in the choice they made.

Similar findings have been reported in studies of elections: Voters express greater confidence in their candidates when they are interviewed after they’ve voted than when they are interviewed right before casting a ballot (Frenkel & Doob, 1976; Regan & Kilduff, 1988).

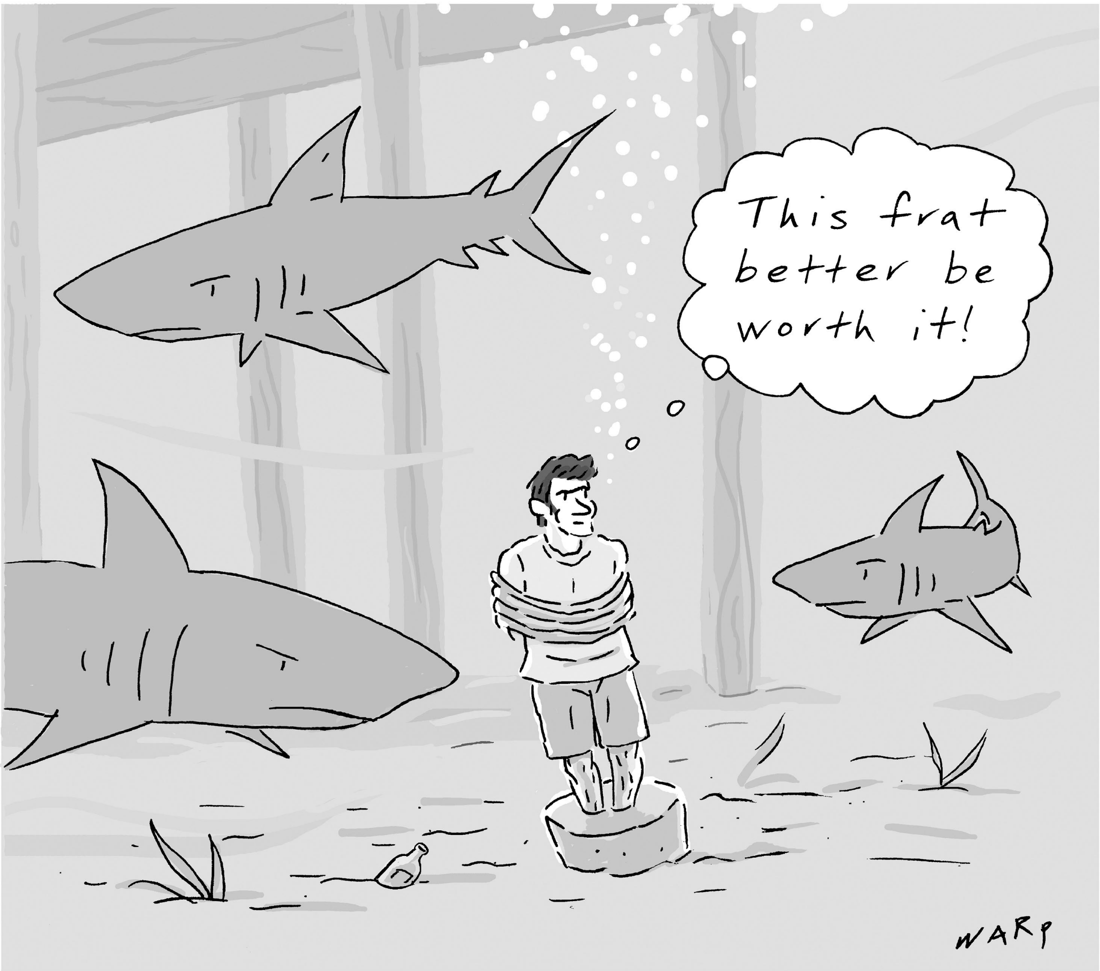
Festinger argued that dissonance reduction takes place only after an irrevocable decision has been made—that is, if the decision can’t be undone. He maintained, for example, that

> there is a clear and undeniable difference between the cognitive processes that occur during the period of making a decision and those that occur after the decision has been made. Reevaluation of alternatives in the direction of favoring the chosen or disfavoring the rejected alternative . . . is a post-decision phenomenon. (Festinger, 1964, p. 30)

The evidence from the betting and election studies supports Festinger’s contention. But this seems at odds with other things we know about people. One of humankind’s distinguishing characteristics is the ability to anticipate the future. If, in the process of making a decision, we see blemishes associated with what is emerging as our favorite option, why not start the process of rationalization beforehand to minimize or eliminate dissonance altogether (T. D. Wilson et al., 2004)?

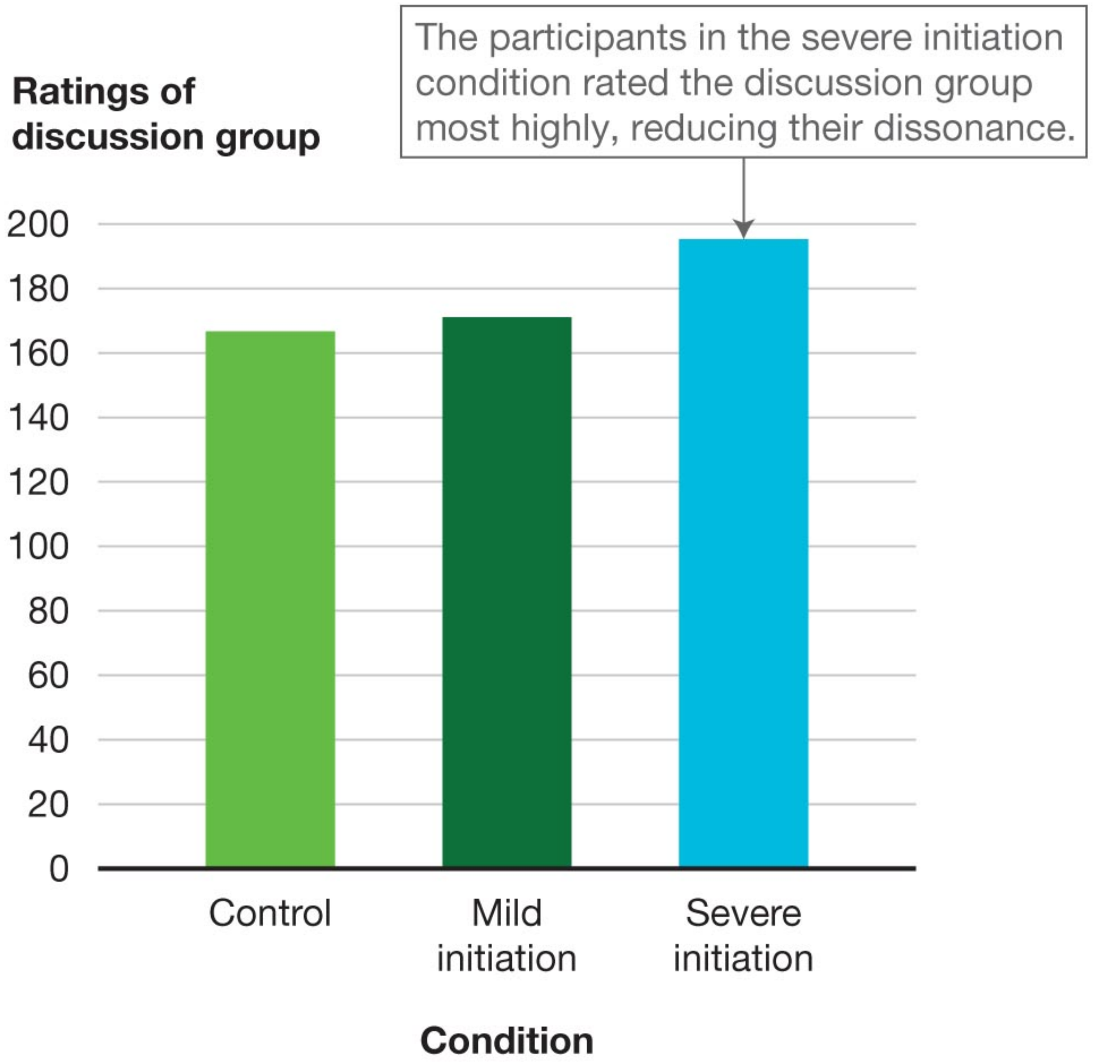
Indeed, more recent research suggests that the same sorts of rationalization and distortion processes that occur after people make a decision also subconsciously take place *before* they make the decision. Whether choosing restaurants, vacation spots, consumer goods, or political candidates, once people develop a slight preference for one option over the others, they distort subsequent information to support their preference (Brownstein, 2003; Brownstein, Read, & Simon, 2004; Russo, Meloy, & Medvec, 1998; D. Simon, Krawczyk, & Holyoak, 2004). Thus, the small size of a particular Italian restaurant tends to be rated as a plus by those leaning toward Italian food (“It’s nice and intimate”) but as a minus by those leaning toward a burger joint (“We won’t be able to talk without everyone overhearing us”). So, Festinger was right in maintaining that decisions evoke dissonance and then dissonance reduction, but these processes seem to occur more broadly than he anticipated; they take place both before and after decisions are made.

EFFORT JUSTIFICATION The element of dissonance theory that rings truest to many people is the idea that if you pay a high price for something—in dollars, time, or effort—and it turns out to be disappointing, you’ll probably experience dissonance. As a result, you’re likely to devote mental energy to justifying what you’ve done; this tendency is known as effort justification. This sort of *sweet lemons rationalization* (“It’s really not so bad”) can be seen in many contexts. Those who don’t have pets often suspect that pet lovers exaggerate the pleasure they get from their animals to offset all the early-morning walking, poop scooping, and furniture wrecking. And those who choose not to have children suspect that sleep-deprived, overtaxed parents are fooling themselves when they say that nothing in life brings greater joy (Eibach & Mock, 2011).


This frat better be worth it!
WARP

Researchers explored this type of dissonance reduction in an early study in which undergraduate women signed up for an experiment, thinking it involved the opportunity to join an ongoing discussion group about sex (Aronson & Mills, 1959). When they arrived, however, the students were told that because not everyone can speak freely and comfortably about such a topic, potential participants had to pass a screening test to join the group. Those assigned to a control condition simply read aloud a list of innocuous words to the experimenter, who was a man. Those assigned to a "mild" initiation condition read aloud a list of mildly embarrassing words, such as *prostitute*, *petting*, and *virgin*. Finally, those in a "severe" initiation group read aloud a list of obscene words and a passage from a novel describing sexual intercourse.

All participants were then told they had passed the screening test and could join the group. The group was meeting that very day, but participants were told that because everyone else in the discussion group had been given a reading assignment beforehand, it was best if they just listened in on the discussion. Then, through headphones in a nearby cubicle, they heard a very boring discussion of the sex life of invertebrates. Not only was the topic not what they had in mind when they signed up for a discussion group about sex, but the discussion group members “contradicted themselves and one another, mumbled several non sequiturs, started sentences that they never finished, hemmed, hawed, and in general conducted one of the most worthless and uninteresting discussions imaginable” (Aronson & Mills, 1959, p. 179).



The participants in the severe initiation condition rated the discussion group most highly, reducing their dissonance.

FIGURE 6.1 GROUP INITIATION AND LIKING FOR THE GROUP This graph shows the different ratings of a discussion group by participants who experienced no initiation (the control condition), a mild initiation, or a severe initiation to join the group. Source: Adapted from Aronson & Mills, 1959.

BOX 6.2

Not So Fast: **Critical Thinking About Surveys Versus Experiments**

Chun Hsien “Michael” Deng, a 19-year-old student at Baruch College in New York City, was excited about joining the school’s Pi Delta Psi fraternity. Like everyone else in the pledge class, he went on a weekend retreat to the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania with the more senior members of the fraternity. While there, he and his fellow pledges were subjected to a “gauntlet”-like hazing ritual in which they were blindfolded and required to negotiate a path while being knocked repeatedly to the ground. Michael suffered a major brain trauma from this hazing ritual, and because his fraternity brothers were slow in seeking medical help, he died shortly after his eventual arrival at a nearby hospital.

Why would a fraternity do such a thing? To be sure, Michael’s death was entirely unintentional, and representatives of the national Pi Delta Psi organization condemned the actions of the Baruch College chapter in no uncertain terms. But dangerous hazing rituals like the one that claimed Michael’s life remain common. More than 40 students are known to have died in incidents like this in the United States since 2005, at least 10 of them in initiations by a single national fraternity. Why do fraternities continue to engage in such practices?

Cognitive dissonance theory provides one answer. Having pledges undergo a painful initiation ritual can make them, once they’ve gone through it, more dedicated to the fraternity. After all, it may be hard for someone to walk away from an organization after paying such a stiff price to become a member. Doing so would likely cause a lot of dissonance, which could be reduced by deciding that the fraternity is a wonderful organization, one that is sure to make college a golden time.

How can we establish that efforts to reduce that dissonance really do lie at the heart of fraternity hazing? Stated differently, how can we determine whether fraternities that have more severe initiations do indeed cultivate more loyalty and enthusiasm among their members? One approach would be to survey members of various fraternities to evaluate their commitment to their fraternity. We could also find out about their initiation practices and have judges, unaware of the purpose of the study, rate them for severity. Do the fraternities with the most severe initiations have the most committed members?

Unfortunately (and we hope you’ve anticipated this), such a survey-based finding wouldn’t be informative. It might mean, as dissonance theorists would expect, that undergoing a difficult initiation makes a person feel compelled to embrace the fraternity’s virtues. But the finding might instead be the result of the best, most desirable fraternities having the “luxury” of subjecting their pledges to severe initiations. Maybe it’s just that people wouldn’t tolerate a severe initiation to get into a less attractive fraternity. This is the correlation versus cause problem. It plagues many empirical studies, and savvy consumers of research findings know to anticipate it (see Chapter 2). Only a true experiment—with people randomly assigned to either, say, a "mild initiation" versus "severe initiation" condition—could tell us with great confidence whether more painful initiations lead to greater group loyalty than less painful ones.

FRATERNITY HAZING AND COMMITMENT Fraternities try to increase members' commitment by having them undergo difficult and embarrassing initiation rituals like the one shown here.

The investigators predicted that the discussion would be boring and disappointing to all the participants, but that it would produce dissonance only for those who had undergone a severe initiation to join the group. The cognition “I suffered to get into this group” is inconsistent with the cognition “This group is worthless and boring.” One way for the participants in the severe initiation condition to reduce dissonance would be to convince themselves that the group and the discussion weren’t so boring after all. Indeed, when the experimenters asked participants at the end of the study to rate the quality of the discussion, those in the severe initiation condition rated it more favorably than did the participants in the other two conditions (**Figure 6.1**).

The need to justify “costly” behavior influences people in other areas of life as well. When people pay for consumer goods in ways that feel costly, such as with cash or a check, they end up being more committed to the product and to the company from which they bought it than when they pay in ways that feel less costly, such as with a debit or credit card (A. M. Shah et al., 2016). And when people have to assemble a product (think IKEA) before they can enjoy it, they end up enjoying it more—as long as the assembly is successful and doesn’t result in a torrent of cursing (Norton, Mochon, & Ariely, 2012).

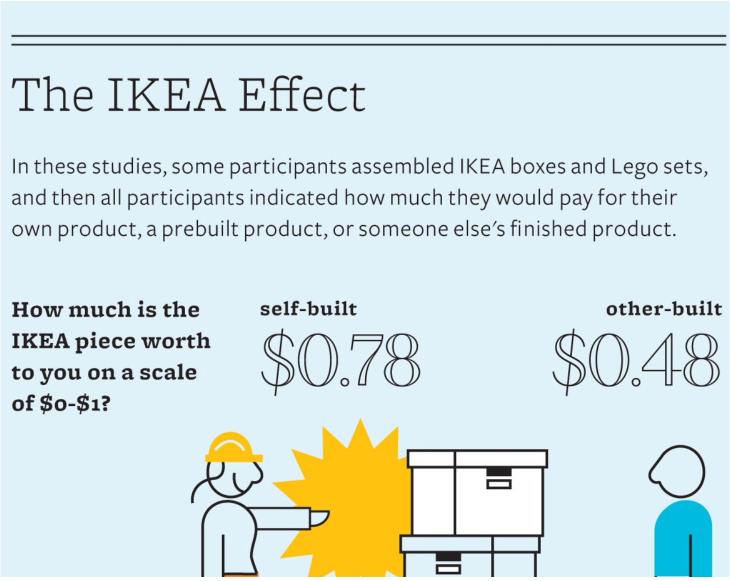
INDUCED COMPLIANCE AND ATTITUDE CHANGE Cognitive dissonance theory can also explain what often happens as a result of induced (forced) compliance—that is, when people are induced to behave in a manner that’s inconsistent with their beliefs, attitudes, or values. Most people will feel some discomfort with the mismatch between the way they have been induced to behave and their attitudes. One way to deal with the inconsistency—the easiest and most likely way, given that the behavior can’t be taken back—is for people to change their original attitudes. This was the idea behind President Johnson’s strategy, described at the beginning of the chapter: When skeptics publicly defended the administration’s position on the Vietnam War, the inconsistency between their private reservations and their public comments should have led them to dispel their doubts.

In the first experiment to demonstrate the power of induced compliance to shift people’s attitudes, Leon Festinger and Merrill Carlsmith (1959) had participants in a control condition engage in what can only be described as experimental drudgery for an hour (loading spools on a tray over and over, turning pegs on a pegboard a quarter turn at a time). Immediately afterward, these participants were asked to rate how much they enjoyed the experiment. They gave quite low ratings. No surprise there.

A CLOSER LOOK

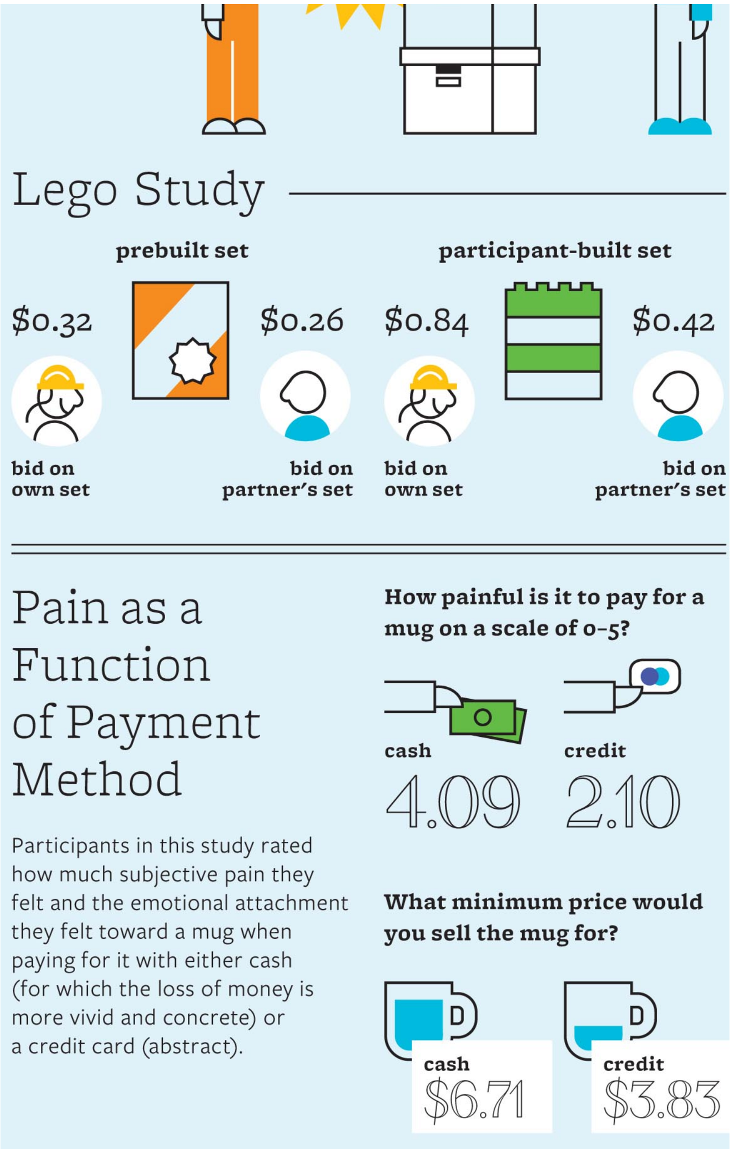
How Cognitive Dissonance Can Make You Like What You Buy

Cognitive dissonance isn’t just a laboratory phenomenon. As consumers, businesses, and marketers can attest, it also has widespread influence in real-world contexts, including product choice, consumer satisfaction, and brand loyalty. When a product is more difficult to acquire, people often justify the extra effort by evaluating the product more positively.



The IKEA Effect

In these studies, some participants assembled IKEA boxes and Lego sets, and then all participants indicated how much they would pay for their own product, a prebuilt product, or someone else’s finished product.



Participants in this study rated how much subjective pain they felt and the emotional attachment they felt toward a mug when paying for it with either cash (for which the loss of money is more vivid and concrete) or a credit card (abstract).

FOR CRITICAL THINKING

1. What are some potential implications of effort justification in other consumer industries, such as restaurant/dining, travel, and entertainment?
2. From the perspective of self-perception theory (see pp. 204 – 8), why would people evaluate a product differently if they build it themselves? If they pay for it with cash versus credit?

Sources: The IKEA Effect: Norton, Mochon & Ariely, 2012; Pain as a Function of Payment Method: Shah, et al., 2016.

Participants in two other conditions also engaged in the boring task but were subsequently told that the experiment involved how performance on a task is influenced by expectations about it beforehand. These participants were then led to believe that they were in a control, “no expectation,” condition and that other subjects had been told beforehand that the study was either very interesting or boring. Looking rather sheepish, the experimenter then explained that the next participant was about to show up and needed to be told the study was interesting. This was usually done, the experimenter said, by a confederate posing as a participant. But the confederate was absent, putting the experimenter in a bit of a jam. Would you, the experimenter asked, play the role usually performed by the confederate and tell the next participant that the experiment is interesting? The experimenter offered the participant either $1 or $20 for doing so.

Nearly every participant agreed to the request. In this “play within a play,” the true participants believed they were confederates. What was most important to the experiment, and what was readily apparent to the participants, was that they had just been induced to behave in a way that was inconsistent with their true attitude: They lied by saying that a mind-numbingly boring study was interesting. Festinger and Carlsmith predicted that telling this lie would produce dissonance for those participants paid only $1 for the assignment. Their words were inconsistent with their beliefs, and $1 wasn’t enough to justify the lie. In contrast, those paid $20 would not have any need to rationalize because the reward was substantial and the lie was of little consequence. To reduce their dissonance, participants in the $1 condition would rationalize their behavior by changing their attitude about the task they had performed. If they convinced themselves the task was interesting after all, their lie wouldn't really be a lie. Consistent with these predictions, when participants in the $1 condition later evaluated their experience, they rated the monotonous tasks more favorably than participants in the other conditions did. Only the participants in the $1 condition rated the activities above the neutral point (**Figure 6.2**).

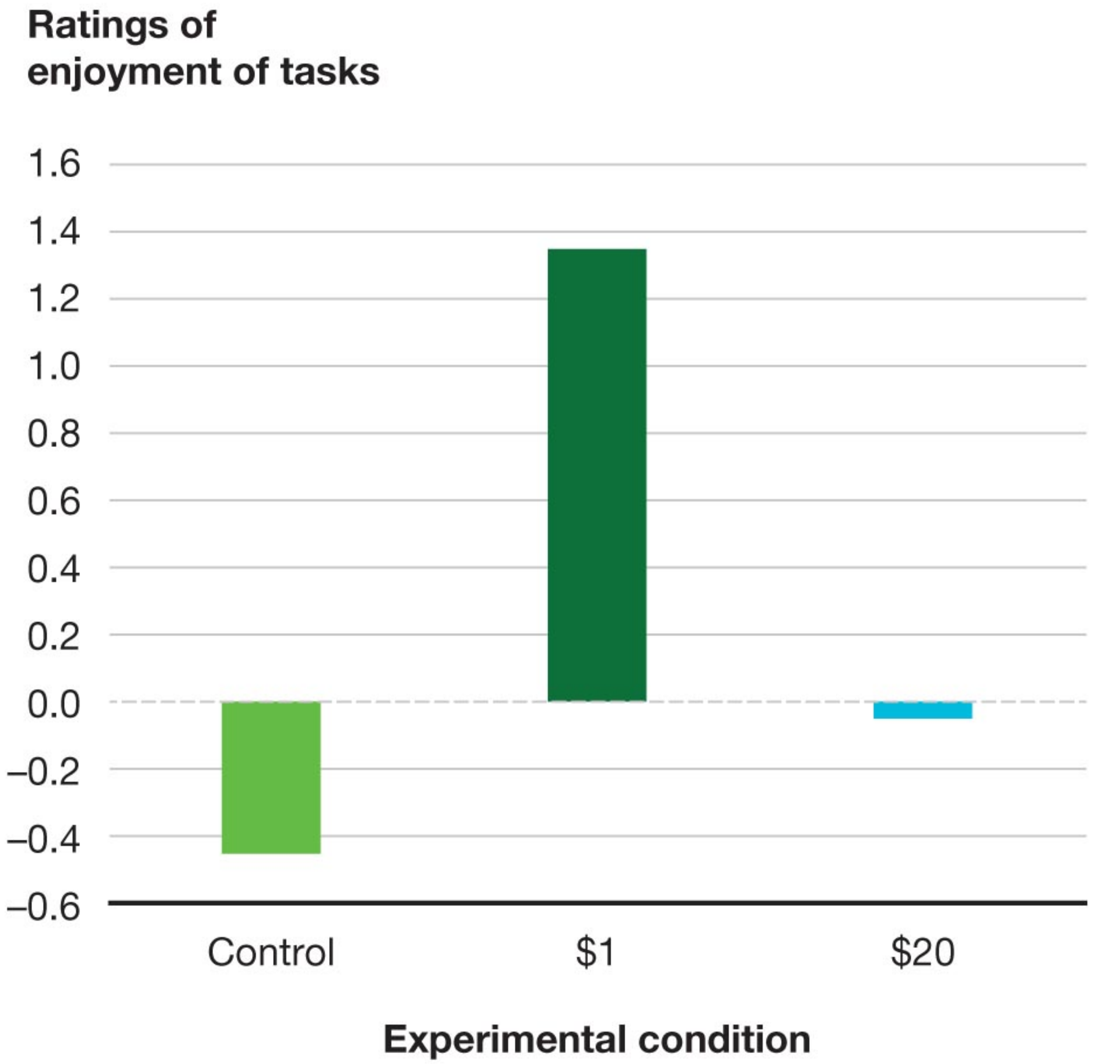


FIGURE 6.2 **INDUCED COMPLIANCE AND ATTITUDE CHANGE** Saying something we don't believe, and doing so with little justification ($1 instead of $20), produces dissonance. To reduce this dissonance, in this study the participants in the $1 condition rated the boring task more favorably than

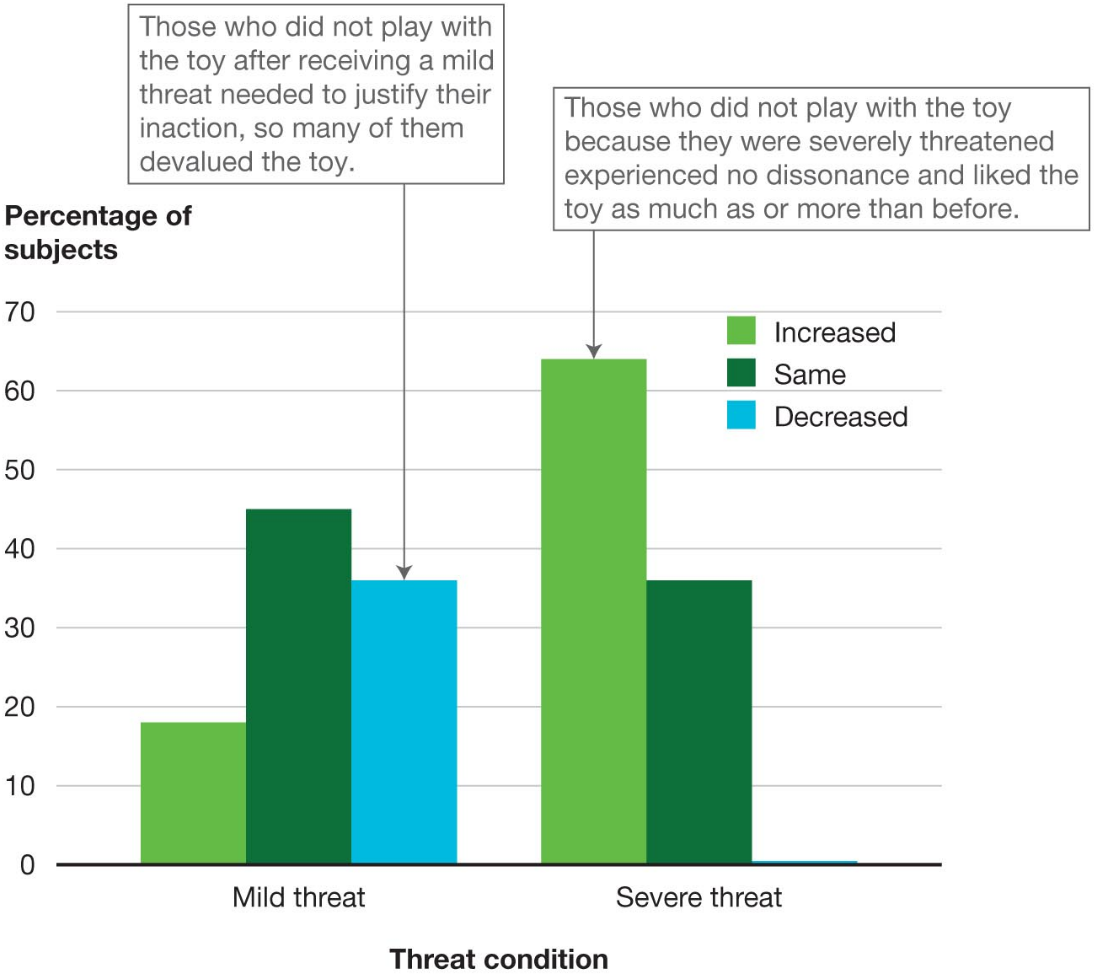
did the participants in the other two conditions, thereby providing some justification for their behavior. Ratings of task enjoyment were made on a −5 (extremely dull and boring) to +5 (extremely interesting and enjoyable) scale. Source: Adapted from Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959.

One takeaway from this study is that if you want to persuade people to do something (such as take schoolwork seriously, protect the environment, or refrain from using foul language) and you want them to internalize the broader message behind the behavior, you should use the smallest amount of incentive or coercion necessary to get them to do it. In other words, don't go overboard with the incentives. If the inducements are too big, people will justify their behavior accordingly — "It was worth it for the payoff" (like participants in Festinger and Carlsmith's $20 condition)—and they won't have to rationalize their behavior by coming to believe in the broader purpose or philosophy behind it. But if the inducements are just barely sufficient (as in the $1 condition), their need to rationalize will tend to produce attitude change in line with their behavior.

INDUCED COMPLIANCE AND EXTINGUISHING UNDESIRED BEHAVIOR The flip side of induced compliance involves the use of mild versus severe punishments, as is illustrated by experiments using the "forbidden toy" paradigm (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1963; Freedman, 1965; Lepper, 1973). In one such study, a researcher showed nursery school children a set of five toys and asked them to say how much they liked each one. He then said he would have to leave the room for a bit but would be back soon. In the meantime, the children were free to play with any of the toys except their second-favorite. Half the kids were told not to play with the forbidden toy because the experimenter would "be annoyed" if they did. This was the "mild threat" condition. In the "severe threat" condition, if the kids played with the forbidden toy, the experimenter “would be very angry” and “would have to take all the toys and go home and never come back again.”

While the experimenter was gone, each child was covertly observed, and none played with the forbidden toy. The investigators predicted that not playing with the forbidden toy would produce dissonance, but only for the children in the mild threat condition. For all children, not playing with the toy would be inconsistent with the fact that it was highly desirable, but for those who received the severe threat, the severity of the threat justified not playing with the toy. For children who received only a mild threat, there would be no such justification, producing dissonance, and they would likely resolve the inconsistency by devaluing the toy, convincing themselves it wasn’t so great after all.

To find out whether these predictions were correct, the children had to reevaluate all five toys when the experimenter returned. As expected, those in the severe threat condition either didn’t change their opinion of the forbidden toy or liked it even more than before (**Figure 6.3**).



Those who did not play with the toy after receiving a mild threat needed to justify their inaction, so many of them devalued the toy.

Those who did not play with the toy because they were severely threatened experienced no dissonance and liked the toy as much as or more than before.

FIGURE 6.3 **DEVALUING THE FORBIDDEN TOY** For this study, the graphs show the percentages of children in the mild and severe threat conditions whose opinion of the forbidden toy increased, stayed the same, or decreased. Thirty-six percent of the children in the mild threat condition devalued the toy, whereas fewer than one percent of the children in the severe threat condition did. Source: Adapted from Aronson & Carlsmith, 1963.

In contrast, many of those in the mild threat condition viewed the toy less favorably. Thus, the threat of severe punishment will keep children from doing something you don’t want them to do, but they will still, later on, want to do it. The threat of mild punishment—if it’s just enough of a threat to keep them from doing it—can bring about psychological change such that they’ll no longer be tempted to do what you don’t want them to do.

When Does Inconsistency Produce Dissonance?

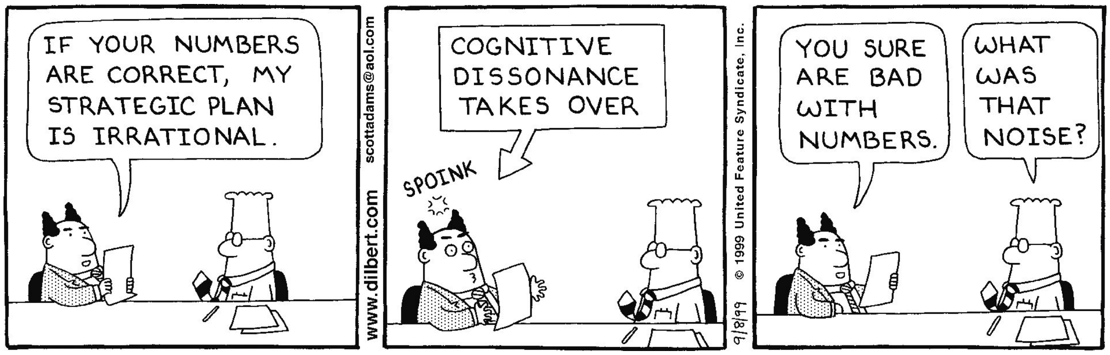
Festinger’s original insight was that holding two inconsistent cognitions triggers dissonance. But what constitutes inconsistency? And what’s so jarringly unpleasant about inconsistency? These questions, in turn, lead to a more crucial question: Which situations are likely to cause dissonance, and which ones aren’t?

Eliot Aronson offered an answer. A given inconsistency will arouse dissonance, Aronson argued, if it implicates our core sense of self (Aronson, 1969; S. J. Sherman & Gorkin, 1980). People like to think of themselves as rational, morally upright, worthy individuals, and anything that challenges such assessments tends to produce dissonance (Kouchaki & Gino, 2016). Expending great effort to join a boring discussion group calls into question our wisdom and rationality; telling another student that a tedious task is interesting challenges our integrity.

To understand the sorts of cognitions that might challenge our sense of our own good judgment and personal character, it’s useful to think about when *someone else’s* actions make us question *that person’s* character and to consider the justifications that would prevent us from questioning that person’s judgment or moral fiber. Suppose you ask a tech-savvy friend to help you with a computer problem, but he says no. How harshly would you judge him? The answer probably depends on several factors. First, you wouldn’t blame him if he couldn’t have acted otherwise—for example, if he was at work and his boss wouldn’t let him leave. He had no choice. Second, you probably wouldn’t blame him much if he could justify his actions; perhaps he had to study for an important exam. He *could* have helped out—he had some choice in the matter—but it’s clear that doing so would have been costly for him. Third, you would probably judge him more or less harshly in rough proportion to how much harm resulted from his failure to help. You would (understandably) think worse of him if you ended up failing a course because of it than if you were simply prevented from surfing Instagram or TikTok. Finally, you wouldn’t blame him much if you had never told him just how badly you needed his help; after all, he had no way to foresee the harm his refusal might cause.

This analysis of when we hold other people responsible for their actions helps illuminate when we will hold *ourselves* responsible for our behavior and experience dissonance as a result. Specifically, this analysis suggests that we ought to experience dissonance whenever we act in ways that are inconsistent with our core values and beliefs and (a) the behavior was freely chosen, (b) the behavior wasn’t sufficiently justified, (c) the behavior had negative consequences, and (d) the negative consequences were foreseeable.

FREE CHOICE The critical role of freedom of choice has been demonstrated in many studies. In the first of these, college students were offered either $0.50 or $2.50 to write an essay in favor of a state law banning communists from speaking on college campuses (Linder, Cooper, & Jones, 1967). Since the original experiment was done in the mid-1960s, both payments seem low now; for comparable amounts today, it would be reasonable to multiply by a factor of 8: a bit over $4 and $20, respectively. Because the law was at odds with the U.S. Constitution’s guarantee of freedom of speech, nearly all students were opposed to it, and their essays thus conflicted with their true beliefs. For half the participants, their freedom to agree (or decline) to write such an essay was emphasized. For the other half, it was not. There was no dissonance effect among participants whose freedom to agree or decline was *not* emphasized. Indeed, those paid $2.50 later expressed attitudes more in favor of the ban than those paid $0.50 (presumably because writing the essay was associated with the good feelings that accompany the larger reward). In the free-choice group, however, the standard dissonance effect was obtained: Those paid $0.50 changed their attitude more than those paid $2.50.


IF YOUR NUMBERS ARE CORRECT, MY STRATEGIC PLAN IS IRRATIONAL.
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YOU SURE ARE BAD WITH NUMBERS.
WHAT WAS THAT NOISE?

INSUFFICIENT JUSTIFICATION This last experiment, like all the induced-compliance studies (including Festinger and Carlsmith’s original $1/$20 study), also demonstrates the role of insufficient justification in arousing dissonance. If a person’s behavior is justified by a powerful incentive of some sort, even behavior that dramatically conflicts with the person’s beliefs won’t produce dissonance. Those paid $2.50 (roughly $20 today) for writing an essay that was inconsistent with their true beliefs felt no pressure to change their attitudes because their behavior was justified by the large cash payment. Those paid only $0.50 (roughly $4 today) had no such justification and thus felt the full weight of their behavioral inconsistency.

NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES If nothing of consequence results from actions that are at variance with our attitudes and values, it’s easy to dismiss them as trivial. Indeed, studies have shown that people experience dissonance only when their behavior results in harm of some sort. In one such study using Festinger and Carlsmith’s paradigm, participants were induced to tell someone (who was actually an associate working with the researchers) that a boring experiment was very interesting. For doing so, they were offered either a small or a large incentive (J. Cooper & Worchel, 1970). Half the time, the confederate appeared convinced that the boring task was going to be interesting, and half the time the confederate clearly remained unconvinced: “Well, you’re entitled to your own opinion, but I don’t think I’ve ever enjoyed an experiment, and I don’t think I’ll find this one much fun.” Note that there were no negative consequences when the person appeared unconvinced: No one was deceived. So, if negative consequences are necessary for the arousal of dissonance, the standard dissonance effect should occur only when the other person (i.e., the confederate) appears convinced and the participant feels like a deceiver. That’s exactly what happened: The boring task was rated more favorably only by participants who were offered little incentive to lie and were paired with a confederate who appeared to believe the lie.

FORESEEABILITY We typically don’t hold people responsible for harm they’ve done if the harm wasn’t foreseeable. If a dinner guest who is allergic to peanuts becomes ill after eating a dish with peanut sauce, we don’t hold the host responsible if the guest never informed the host of the allergy. As this example suggests, it may be the *foreseeability of the negative consequences of our actions* that generates cognitive dissonance. Negative consequences that aren’t foreseeable don’t threaten a person’s self-image as a moral and decent person, so they shouldn’t arouse dissonance.

Supporting this reasoning are experiments in which participants are induced to write an essay in favor of a position that they oppose (for example, that the size of the freshman class at their university should be doubled). If any negative consequences of such an action are made known to the participants after the fact (the essays will be shown to a university committee charged with deciding whether to implement the policy), there’s no dissonance, and hence students’ attitudes do not change in the direction of the essay they wrote. But if the negative consequences are either foreseen (participants know beforehand that their letters will be shown to the committee) or foreseeable (they know ahead of time that their letters *might* be shown to such a committee), the standard dissonance effect is obtained (J. Cooper, 1971; Goethals, Cooper, & Naficy, 1979).

Self-Affirmation and Dissonance

If dissonance results from threats to people’s sense of themselves as rational, competent, and moral beings, it follows that they can ward off dissonance both directly, by dealing with the specific threat itself, and indirectly, by taking stock of their other good qualities and core values. As discussed in Chapter 3, Claude Steele and his colleagues have argued that this sort of self-affirmation is a common way in which people cope with threats to their self-esteem (G. L. Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Correll, Spencer, & Zanna, 2004; McQueen & Klein, 2006; Steele, 1988). “Sure, I might have violated a friend’s confidence, but I’m very empathetic when other people are having difficulties.” “I know I drive an SUV, but no one puts in more volunteer hours than I do.” By bolstering themselves in one area, people can tolerate a bigger hit in another.

AFFIRMING THE SELF, WARDING OFF DISSONANCE This pro-environment couple may ward off any dissonance that might be aroused by their choice to drive an SUV by reminding themselves how devoted they are to their church and its good works.

Research has examined how self-affirmation can assuage the need to reduce dissonance in a situation that will be familiar to many of us. Imagine you’ re having a conversation with someone—a coworker, friend, family member—and in the course of the conversation the person makes a prejudicial remark with which you strongly disagree. Do you confront the person or let the remark pass? Let’ s be honest: We often let remarks like this slide because confrontation is uncomfortable and can have interpersonal costs (Czopp & Ashburn-Nardo, 2012). But for those of us who think it’ s important to confront prejudice, not doing so arouses dissonance, and we start rationalizing our failure to act. And that’ s exactly what researchers have shown: People who value confronting prejudice but fail to do so end up evaluating the person making the prejudicial remark more favorably—and even reduce the importance they place on confronting prejudice in the first place (Rasinski, Geers, & Czopp, 2013). There’s some better news though. These researchers also showed that a simple self-affirmation intervention—giving nonconfronters a few minutes to make a list of their positive characteristics—eliminated the need to reduce the dissonance arising from their failure to confront.

Is Dissonance Universal?

We have discussed cognitive dissonance as if it were a cross-culturally universal phenomenon. Is it? Research on this question has yielded some interesting answers. In one study using the free-choice, self-affirmation paradigm, researchers asked Japanese and Canadian participants to choose between two objects (CDs, in this case) to see if they would exhibit the dissonance effect by rationalizing their decision as the correct one. The researchers, however, first gave some participants self-affirmation in the form of positive feedback on a personality test (Heine & Lehman, 1997). The researchers wanted to see if the dissonance effect was the same in people from the two different cultures. The results for the Canadians were similar to those in earlier studies: Participants showed a substantial dissonance effect in the control condition, finding previously unnoticed attractions in the chosen CD and previously unnoticed flaws in the unchosen one, but no dissonance effect if they had received positive feedback about their personalities. The Japanese participants, in contrast, were unaffected by the self-affirmation manipulation. More striking still, they showed no dissonance effect in *either* condition, which led the researchers to conclude that dissonance might be a phenomenon unique to Westerners. But using an induced-compliance paradigm, researchers in another study persuaded participants to do something they didn’t want to do and found dissonance effects for Japanese participants—if they were led to think that other people were observing their behavior (Sakai, 1981).

As we have emphasized throughout this book, East Asians, along with many other people in the world, are more attuned than Westerners are to other people and their reactions. If East Asians exhibit dissonance effects in the induced-compliance paradigm because they question their actions when others are observing them, then they should also show dissonance effects in the free-choice paradigm if they are led to think about other people’s possible reactions to their choice.

This outcome was demonstrated in a study in which investigators had participants choose between two CDs under one of two circumstances (Kitayama et al., 2004). For some participants, hanging right in front of them at eye level was the poster shown in **Figure 6.4**, allegedly a prop from an unrelated experiment. But in actuality, the researchers wanted to see whether the schematic faces in the poster might prime the concept of “social others,” thereby prompting the Japanese participants to show a dissonance effect. And that’s what happened: In the standard free-choice condition, the Japanese showed no evidence of dissonance reduction, but in the poster condition, they did. American participants actually showed the same or even slightly less dissonance reduction in the poster condition than in the standard condition.

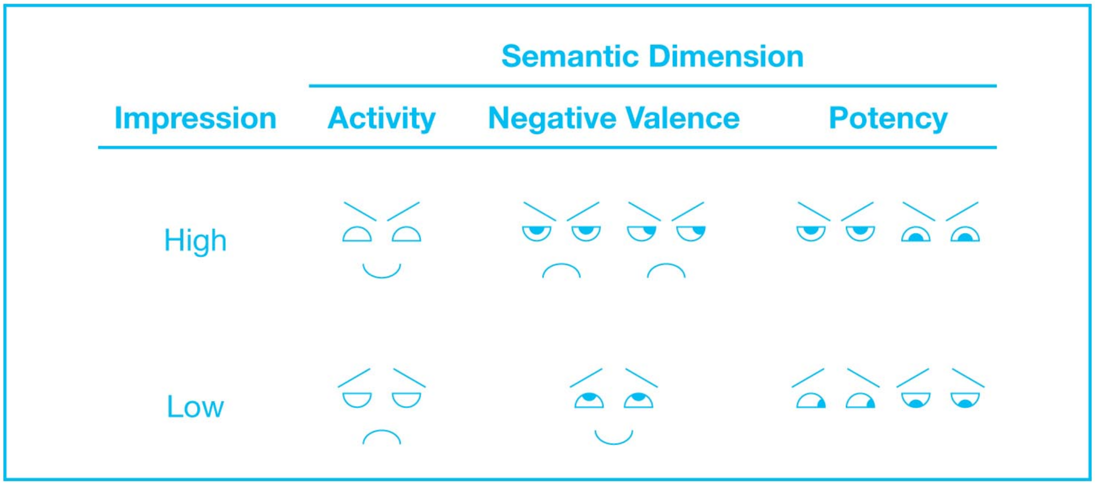


FIGURE 6.4 **CULTURE AND PRIMING** This is the poster used by researchers to prime the idea of “social others.” The labels were included simply to make the poster look like part of another, unrelated experiment. Source: Adapted from Kitayama et al., 2004.

Another research team observed a similar effect of social priming when they had participants choose a CD either for themselves or for a friend (Hoshino-Browne et al., 2004). European Canadians, as well as Asian Canadians who only weakly identified as Asians, showed much larger dissonance effects when choosing for themselves than when choosing for a friend. However, Asian Canadians who strongly identified as Asians showed much larger dissonance effects when choosing for a friend than when choosing for themselves.

LOOKING BACK

Behavior can have a powerful influence on attitudes, largely because people like their attitudes to be consistent with their behavior. Inconsistency between cognitions or values and actions usually produces cognitive dissonance. We can reduce dissonance by changing our attitudes to be in line with our behavior. Dissonance is more pronounced when the inconsistency implies that the self is deficient in some way. Therefore, when we can affirm the self somehow, we are less susceptible to dissonance. Different circumstances arouse dissonance in people of different cultures.

Glossary

cognitive dissonance theory	The theory that inconsistency between a person’s thoughts, sentiments, and actions creates an aversive emotional state (dissonance) that leads to efforts to restore consistency.
effort justification	The tendency to reduce dissonance by justifying the time, effort, or money devoted to something that turned out to be unpleasant or disappointing.
induced (forced) compliance	Subtly compelling people to behave in a manner that is inconsistent with their beliefs, attitudes, or values in order to elicit dissonance and therefore a change in their original attitudes and values.

Self-Perception Theory

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe how self-perception theory provides an alternative account for dissonance phenomena.
- Explain how self-perception and dissonance accounts can be reconciled.
- Explain how bodily cues can influence people’s thoughts and feelings.

Like all prominent, long-standing theories, cognitive dissonance theory has faced many theoretical challenges and numerous critiques. One critique, however, stands out above all others in its impact: Daryl Bem’s self-perception theory (D. J. Bem, 1967, 1972). The theory began as an alternative account of all of the cognitive dissonance findings, but it has important implications for self-understanding more generally and offers novel explanations for many real-life choices and behaviors.

Inferring Our Own Attitudes

According to Bem’s self-perception theory, people don’t always come to know their own attitudes by introspecting about what they think or how they feel about something. Rather, they often look outward at their behavior and the context in which it occurred and from there *infer* what their attitudes must be. Self-perception works just like social perception. People come to understand themselves and their attitudes in the same way that they come to understand others and their attitudes.

> “How do I know what I think until I hear what I say?”
>
> —ANONYMOUS

At first this idea feels wrong on a gut level. We’re convinced that sometimes we “just know” how we feel about something, and we don’t need to engage in any process of inference to find out. But on closer inspection, self-perception theory makes a lot of sense, in part because Bem concedes that sometimes we can just analyze our thoughts to figure out our attitudes. It’s only when our prior attitudes are “weak, ambiguous, and uninterpretable,” he argues, that “the individual is functionally in the same position as an outside observer” (D. J. Bem, 1972, p. 2).

This caveat is helpful. Most of us can remember times when we figured out how we felt about something by examining our behavior. “I guess I was hungrier than I thought,” you might say after downing a second bacon cheeseburger. The key question, then, is whether the inference process at the heart of self-perception theory applies only to such trivial matters as these or whether the process operates in situations that test our more substantial attitudes, such as working on a political campaign or choosing to buy a particular car.

Bem’s account of the effects observed in the various dissonance experiments is quite simple. He argues that people aren’t troubled by any unpleasant state of arousal like dissonance; they merely engage in a rational inference process. They don’t *change* their attitudes; they *infer* what their attitudes must be. For example, people value what they have chosen more after having chosen it because they infer, “If I chose this, I must like it.” People form tight bonds to groups that have unpleasant initiation rituals because they reason, “If I suffered to get this, I must have felt it was worth it.” And people who have little incentive to tell someone that a task is interesting come to view the task more favorably because they conclude, “There’s no other reason I would say this is interesting if it wasn’t, so it really must be.”

In support of this explanation, Bem showed that when *observer-subjects* (participants who only observe a situation versus actually experiencing it for themselves) read descriptions of dissonance experiments and are asked what attitude a participant would have had, the observer-subjects replicate the attitudes of the actual participants (D. J. Bem, 1967, 1972). They assume, for example, that a person who was paid only $1 to say that working on a boring task was interesting would have more favorable attitudes toward the task than a person paid $20 would. Bem reasoned that if the observers can come up with the same inferences about attitudes as the attitudes reported by the actual participants, there’s no reason to assume the participants themselves arrived at their beliefs because they were motivated to reduce dissonance.

Reconciling the Dissonance and Self-Perception Accounts

As already noted, cognitive dissonance theory states that the inconsistency between behavior and prior attitudes or values produces an unpleasant physiological state that motivates people to reduce the inconsistency. If there’s no unpleasant psychological arousal, there’s no attitude change. Self-perception theory, in contrast, contends that no arousal is involved: People coolly and rationally infer what their attitudes must be in light of their behavior and the context in which it occurred. Therefore, any decisive test to determine which of the two theories is more accurate should focus on whether people experience arousal in the standard dissonance paradigms (for example, the induced-compliance paradigm) and in similar everyday situations.

BOX 6.3

FOCUS ON EDUCATION

The Overjustification Effect and Superfluous Rewards

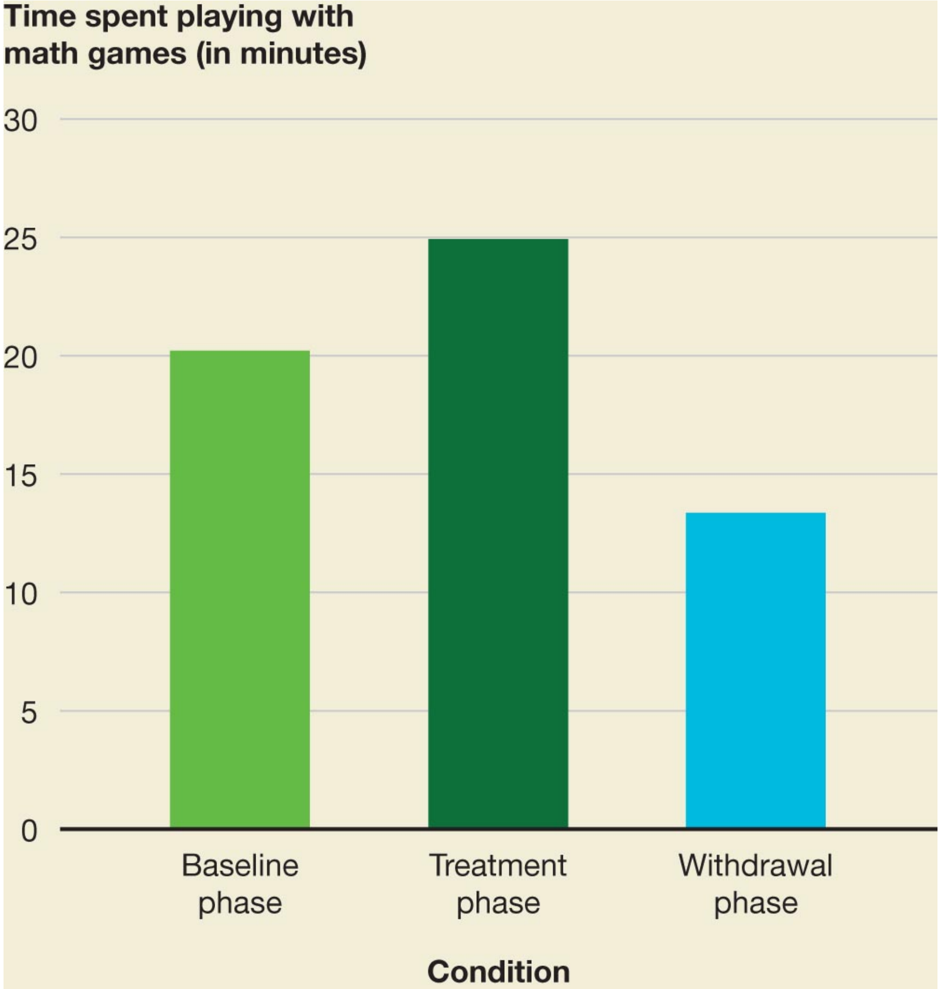
If you dropped in on a family dinner in a foreign country and heard a parent tell a child she had to eat her *pfunst* before she could eat her *pfeffatorst*, you’d immediately conclude that the youngster didn’t like *pfunst* but loved *pfeffatorst*. Things people do only to get something else are typically things they don’t particularly like. But what happens if the child actually likes *pfunst*? Because the parents are making her eat *pfunst* in order to have the privilege of eating *pfeffatorst*, she might decide that maybe *pfunst* isn’t so great after all.

Self-perception theory makes just such a prediction. This tendency to devalue those activities we perform, even if they are pleasing, in order to get something else is known as the *overjustification effect* (Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1973). The initial justification for performing the pleasing activity (eating *pfunst*) is evident: We would do it because it’s inherently rewarding—this is the intrinsic reason we do it. But we also do it because there’s an external payoff (eating *pfeffatorst*)—this is the extrinsic reason. Because the extrinsic reason would be sufficient to produce the behavior, we might discount the intrinsic reason and conclude that we don’t much like the activity for its own sake.

Particularly intriguing evidence for the overjustification effect comes from a study of children’s choice of activities in school. Investigators showed two attractive drawing activities to elementary school children. In one condition, the researchers told the children they could first do one drawing activity and then the other. In a second condition, they were told they *must* do one activity *in order to* do the other. (In both conditions, the experimenters systematically alternated which activity came first.) For several days after this initial drawing session, the experimenters put out both drawing activities during the school’s free-play period and covertly observed how long the children played with each activity. Those who earlier had simply drawn first with one and then the other played with both activities equally often. But those who earlier had used one *in order to* use the other tended to avoid the former (Lepper et al., 1982). Their intrinsic interest in the first drawing activity had been undermined.

The overjustification effect has important implications for how rewards should be used in education and raising children. It’s common practice, for example, to reward children for reading books, getting good grades, or practicing the piano. That’s fine if the child wouldn’t otherwise read, study, or practice. But if the child has some interest in these activities to begin with, the rewards might put that interest in jeopardy. In one powerful demonstration of this danger, researchers introduced a new set of math games into the free-play portion of an elementary school curriculum. As **Figure 6.5** shows, the children initially found the games interesting, as indicated by the amount of time they played with them at the outset of the experiment (baseline phase). Then, for several days afterward, the investigators instituted a “token-economy” program whereby the children could earn points redeemable for prizes by playing with the math games. The more they played, the more points they earned. The token-economy program was effective in increasing how much the children played the games (dark green bar in the treatment phase). But what happened when the token-economy program was terminated and the children no longer earned points for playing the games? Would they still play with them as much? As the blue bar indicates, they did not. Having once received rewards for these activities, the children came to see the math games as something to do only to get a reward, and their original interest was diminished (Greene, Sternberg, & Lepper, 1976).

Such findings don’t imply that giving out rewards is always a bad thing. People aren’t always intrinsically motivated, and when they aren’t, rewards are often the best way to get them to do something they wouldn’t do otherwise. Rewards can also be administered in ways that minimize their negative impact. For instance, rewards can be performance contingent, or based on how well someone performs. These have been shown to be less likely to decrease interest in an activity than task-contingent rewards, which are simply based on whether a task is done or not (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Sansone & Harackiewicz, 2000).


Time spent playing with math games (in minutes)
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
Baseline phase
Treatment phase
Withdrawal phase
Condition

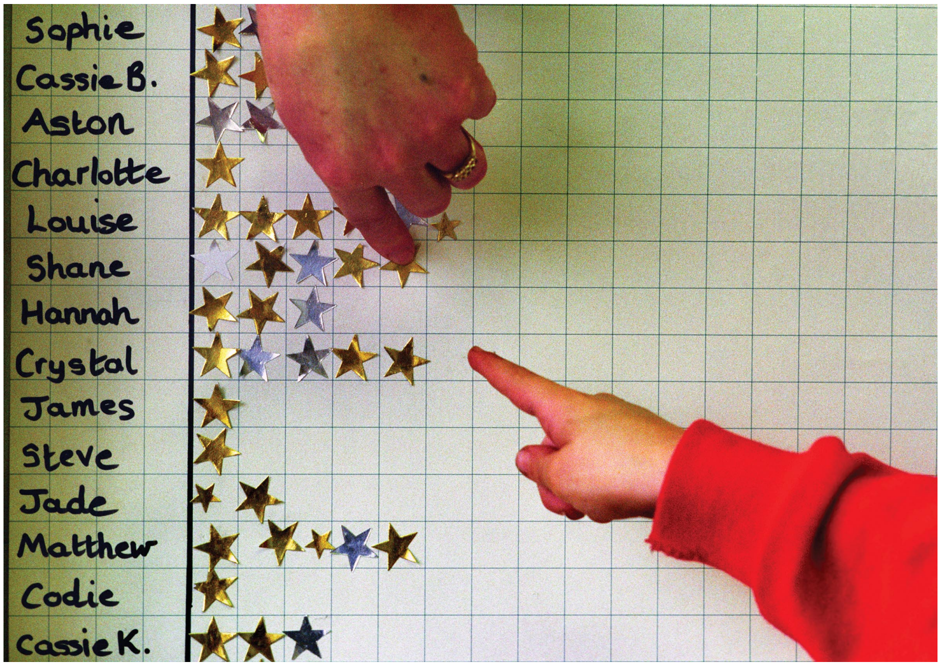

Sophie
Cassie B.
Aston
Charlotte
Louise
Shane
Hannah
Crystal
James
Steve
Jade
Matthew
Codie
Cassie K.

FIGURE 6.5 **The Effects of Superfluous Rewards** This graph shows the amount of time that elementary school children spent playing math games originally (baseline phase), when they received rewards for playing the games (treatment phase), and afterward (withdrawal phase). SOURCE: Adapted from Greene et al., 1976.

Considerable evidence indicates that, as dissonance theory predicts, acting at variance with our true beliefs does indeed generate arousal (Elliot & Devine, 1994; Galinsky, Stone, & Cooper, 2000; Harmon-Jones, 2000; Norton et al., 2003; Waterman, 1969). Dissonance arousal has been detected both with explicit self-report measures (Elliot & Devine, 1994) and with more implicit measures, such as recordings of the electromyographic activity of facial muscles associated with arousal (Martinie et al., 2013) or recordings of brain activity reflecting cognitive conflict (Colosio et al., 2017; Izuma et al., 2010). And there’s evidence that efforts to dispel such arousal and restore consistency underlie the types of attitude change found in dissonance experiments (Harmon-Jones et al., 1996). It thus appears that dissonance theory, not self-perception theory, is the proper account of the phenomena observed in these experiments (and their real-world counterparts).

But self-perception theory and the studies Bem offered to support it nevertheless capture some important aspects of how the mind works. In fact, a consensus has emerged among social psychologists that dissonance reduction processes and self-perception processes both occur, and both of them influence people’s attitudes and broader views of themselves. Dissonance reduction processes are activated when behavior is inconsistent with preexisting attitudes that are clear-cut and of some importance. Self-perception processes, in contrast, are invoked when behavior conflicts with attitudes that are relatively vague or of less import (Chaiken & Baldwin, 1981; Fazio, Zanna, & Cooper, 1977).

This consensus view might make it seem as if self-perception processes are relegated to the trivial fringe of everyday life. They aren’t. Substantial research has made it clear that a surprising proportion of our attitudes *are* rather weak and ambiguous. Although self-perception processes typically influence unimportant attitudes more than important ones, at times they do influence important attitudes—and important subsequent behavior. For example, studies have shown that we exhibit self-perception processes—inferring our own attitudes by observing our behavior—when it comes to such important areas as whether we’re likely to contribute to the public good (Freedman & Fraser, 1966; Uranowitz, 1975), whether we’re likely to cheat to reach a goal (Dienstbier & Munter, 1971), our judgments of the precise emotion we’re feeling and how strongly we feel it (Aucouturier et al., 2016; Dutton & Aron, 1974; Schachter & Singer, 1962), our assessments of our own personality traits (Schwarz et al., 1991), and whether we truly enjoy an activity we have engaged in our entire life (Lepper & Greene, 1978).

SHAME ON THE NRA
THESE DAYS IT'S EASIER FOR A CHILD TO EMPTY ONE OF THESE THAN A BOTTLE OF ASPIRIN.
ARM YOURSELF WITH KNOWLEDGE NOT GUNS

CLEAR-CUT VERSUS VAGUE ATTITUDES Dissonance reduction processes are more likely to be activated when people engage in behavior that is inconsistent with a clear-cut attitude, such as the attitude many people have toward the long-standing issue of gun control. Self-perception processes are more apt to come into play for vaguely held attitudes, such as the attitudes people have about relatively mundane things, such as selfie sticks.

The Embodied Nature of Cognition and Emotion

The crux of self-perception theory—that we use whatever cues we have available to us to figure out what we think and how we feel—fits with a tremendous amount of recent evidence that our thoughts and feelings are affected by, even grounded in, our physical states and bodily movements. This inquiry into “embodied” cognition and emotion has been pursued in many areas of psychology.

A variety of physical actions are associated with different psychological states. When we’re happy, we tend to smile; if we don’t like something, we’re inclined to push it away; and if we agree with something, we nod our head up and down. This is the behavioral component of attitudes discussed earlier: The motor actions of smiling, pushing, and nodding *are important parts of* our attitudes. As a result, if we’re induced to make the bodily movements associated with certain attitudes, beliefs, or emotions, we might come to have, or find it easier to have, those very attitudes, beliefs, or emotions. In other words, in figuring out what we think, feel, or believe, we draw on whatever cues are available to us—including what our body is doing—without being consciously aware that we are doing so.

In one early demonstration of this effect, Gary Wells and Richard Petty (1980) had students ostensibly test a set of headphones by moving their heads up and down or side to side while listening to radio editorials. When later asked about the viewpoints advocated in the editorials, the students indicated that they agreed with them more if they had listened to them while nodding their heads up and down than if they’d listened while shaking their heads from side to side.

EMBODIED COGNITION AND EMOTION Usain Bolt’s pride at winning the race is easily discerned from his outstretched arms, a physical embodiment of pride seen across cultures.

Other researchers have explored the implications of our tendency to push away things we find aversive and pull toward us things we find appealing (see Chapter 1). Because extending the arm is closely associated with negative stimuli (things we want to push away) and flexing the arm is associated with positive stimuli (things we want to pull toward us), being induced to make these bodily movements can have predictable effects on attitudes. In one study, John Cacioppo, Joseph Priester, and Gary Berntson (1993) showed college students a series of 24 Chinese ideographs while they were either pressing down on a table (arm extension) or lifting up a table from underneath (arm flexion). The students evaluated the ideographs presented while they flexed their arms more favorably than those presented while they extended their arms (see also M. Chen & Bargh, 1999; Epley & Gilovich, 2004; Friedman & Förster, 2000).

Effects like these challenge the idea (as self-perception theory does) that our attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs are stored as abstract propositions or representations in the brain. They support an alternative view that our attitudes and beliefs, and even the most abstract concepts, are partly “embodied” in the physical movements associated with those attitudes, beliefs, or concepts (Barsalou, 2008; Niedenthal et al., 2005). Part of the attitude of disapproval or the belief that we don’t like something is represented in the physical act of pushing away. Even our understanding of sentences like “He raced down the corridor” is grounded in the physical act of running. When people read such a sentence, motor regions associated with running become ever so slightly activated. When they read “Raymond picked up the Easter egg,” brain areas involved in grasping become activated (Speer et al., 2009). This explains why people who have had Botox injections (which smooth out wrinkles in the face by immobilizing facial muscles) have a harder time processing sentences containing emotion. Without being able to mimic the emotional expressions themselves as they are reading, the very concepts of sad, angry, and so on, are a bit harder to access and comprehend (Havas et al., 2010).

Thus, the seemingly cognitive act of comprehension isn’t always merely cognitive. To understand something—whether an abstract proposition, a sentence of text, or a possible future state of the world (like cars being self-driven)—people must mentally “try it on,” or simulate it. And what our body is doing or how it’s feeling can facilitate or impede the act of simulation, influencing what we think and feel. Consider the finding that people believe more in the reality of climate change and see it as a more serious threat on hotter days than on cooler days (Y. Li, Johnson, & Zaval, 2011; Risen & Critcher, 2011). In one study, participants were inside a laboratory where the thermostat was set to either 81 or 73 degrees Fahrenheit. Respondents in the warmer room expressed greater belief in global warming. The effect was strong enough that conservatives in a warm room expressed the same concern about the problem as liberals in a cold room. In other words, the effect of the room’s temperature was comparable in magnitude to the effect of political attitudes. It seems, then, that to get a handle on the idea of global warming, we must mentally simulate it, and we do so much more easily when we feel warm (Risen & Critcher, 2011).

LOOKING BACK

In contrast to cognitive dissonance theory, self-perception theory maintains that people infer their attitudes from their behavior. Experimental evidence, however, has shown that people do experience dissonance-induced arousal, and this arousal often motivates attitude change. Nevertheless, researchers have reconciled these two theories by showing that dissonance theory best explains attitude change for preexisting, clear-cut attitudes, whereas self-perception theory can explain attitude change for less clear-cut attitudes. Recent research on embodied cognition indicates that people draw on all sources of information—not just the actions they have performed but also the precise movements of the body—to comprehend ideas and determine their attitudes.

Glossary

self-perception theory

The theory that people come to know their own attitudes by looking at their behavior and the context in which it occurred and then inferring what their attitudes must be.

Beyond Cognitive Consistency to Broader Rationalization

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe the core tenets of system justification theory.
- Describe the core tenets of terror management theory, including how people manage the anxiety they feel when they are reminded of their mortality.

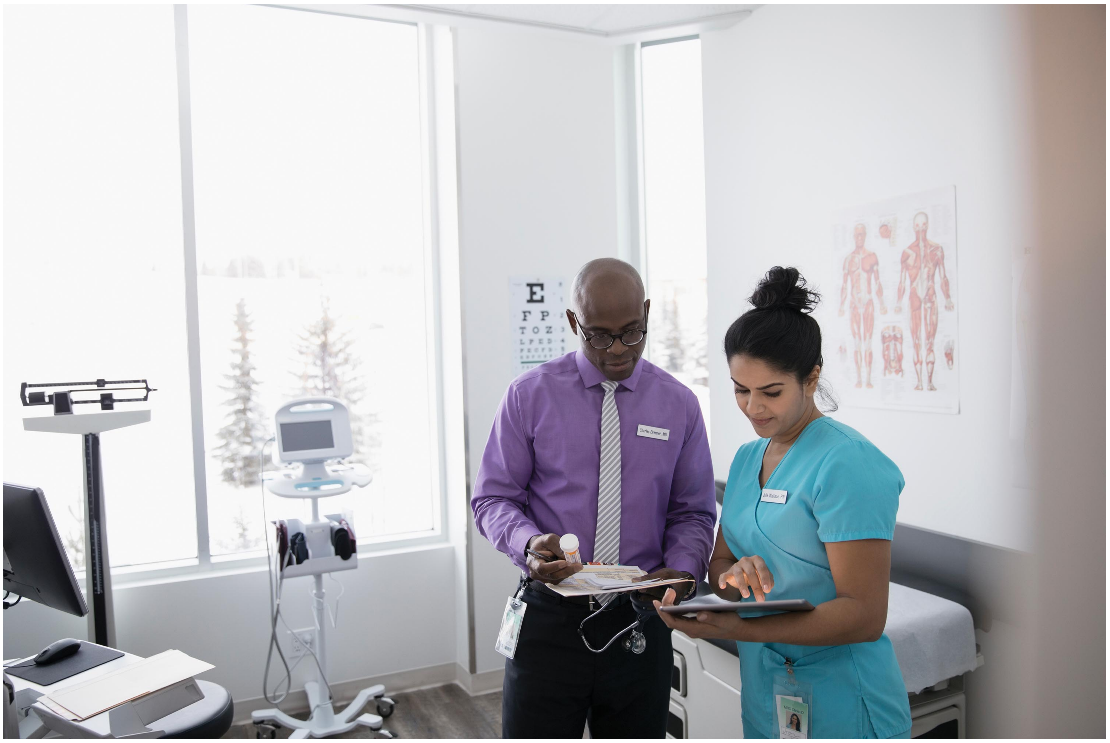
The core of dissonance theory is the idea that people find cognitive inconsistency uncomfortable and therefore try to find ways to relieve the discomfort. Other kinds of tension, of course, can also produce uneasiness, and social psychologists have advanced theories about how we respond to these other sources of discomfort. One deals with the uneasiness that arises when thinking about the problems associated with the broader sociopolitical system to which we are committed. Another deals with the extreme anxiety—indeed, the terror—that can accompany thinking about the inevitability of death.

System Justification Theory

Chapter 3 discusses our need to think well of ourselves (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost & van der Toorn, 2012). Chapter 10 discusses our need to think well of the groups to which we belong—that is, group justification motives. But beyond the desire to think highly of our own talents or to take pride in being, say, a Canadian, a Buddhist, or a conservative, we want to think highly of the larger sociopolitical system we are part of—we want to see it as fair, just, and desirable (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost et al., 2004).

Social psychologists who have studied these tendencies recognize that social and political systems don’t serve everyone’s needs equally. Those who benefit the most from a given system, such as the wealthier and more powerful people in society, have both a psychological motive and an economic incentive to defend the system. People who don’t benefit from the system (or are even disadvantaged by it) obviously don’t have an economic incentive to defend the system, but they do have a psychological incentive to do so. According to system justification theory, believing that the world is or should be fair yet seeing abundant evidence of inequality can generate ideological dissonance. Extolling the virtues of the prevailing system is typically an easier way of reducing that dissonance than trying to bring about effective change. Protest is hard; justification is easy.

Several common observations seem to support system justification theory. Many women, for instance, report that they deserve lower pay than men doing the same work (Hogue, DuBois, & Fox-Cardamone, 2010; Jost, 1997; Major, 1994; O’Brien, Major, & Gilbert, 2012). Low-income groups in the United States don’t necessarily support more egalitarian economic policies over the status quo (C. Fong, 2001; Jost et al., 2003; Rodriguez-Bailon et al., 2017). Some of the most interesting support for the system justification perspective comes from studies that look at compensatory stereotypes, or beliefs that those who occupy less-privileged roles in a society nonetheless derive a number of compensatory benefits: “Low-income people may be poor, but they’re happier than wealthy people”; “Women may not have much power, but they’re nicer, warmer, and more socially connected than men.” These stereotypes give ideological support to the status quo, making people more accepting of the sociocultural status quo (Jost & Kay, 2005; Kay & Jost, 2003).

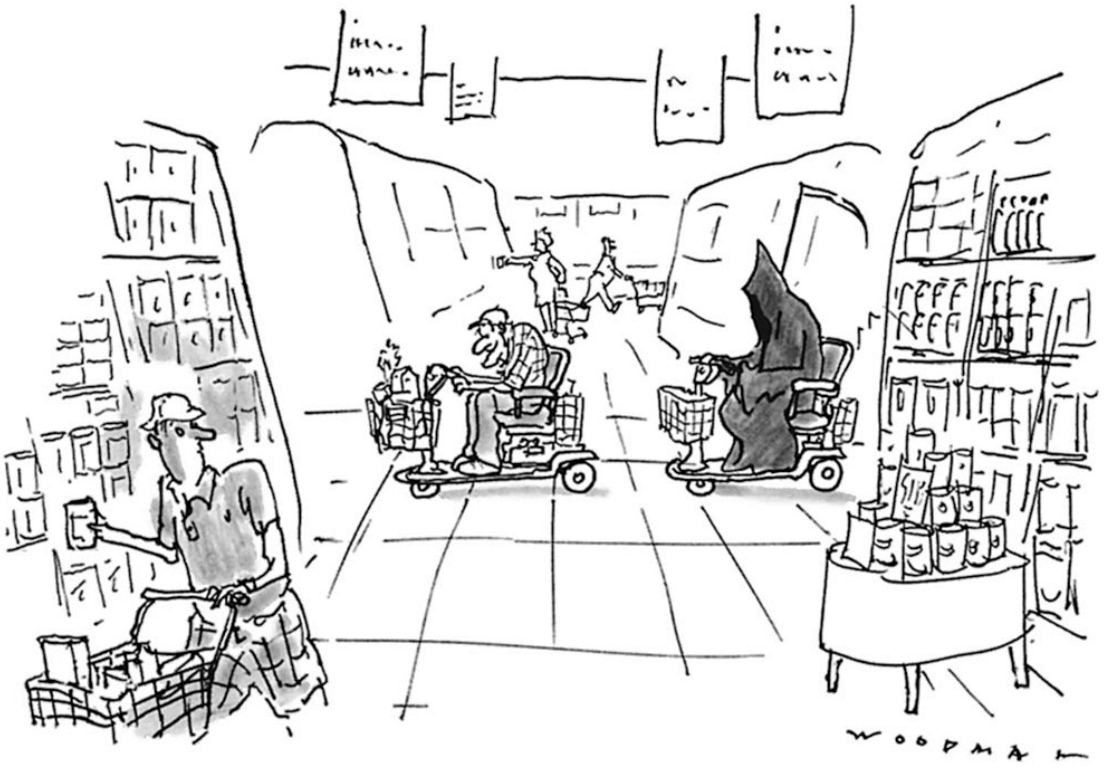


SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION To justify the prevailing sociopolitical system to which they belong, economically disadvantaged people often defend their own disadvantage. For example, sometimes women, such as the nurse shown here, report feeling that they deserve to make less money than their male counterparts doing the same work.

Terror Management Theory

Like other living organisms, humans have an instinct for self-preservation and survival. Humans, however, are uniquely aware of the certainty of death. For many people, this pairing of the desire to live on and knowledge of the inevitability of death can bring on a level of anxiety or “terror” that verges on debilitating. Terror management theory (TMT) specifies what people do to deal with the potentially crippling anxiety they experience when they think about their own mortality. Most of us don’t walk around thinking about our inevitable death a great deal, but when the inevitability of our own death is somehow made salient—for example, upon hearing a loud explosion in the distance, when attending a family funeral, or after witnessing a car accident—we do things to manage the terror inspired by that inevitability.

A common reaction is denial—to maintain that it’s only the physical body and this particular earthly existence that will come to an end. Many people all around the world believe that they will go on living in some form after life on Earth is over. But beyond this common form of what has been called “the denial of death” (Becker, 1973), people can derive some solace from believing that although they personally will cease to exist, much of what they value will live on. For many, this sort of indirect immortality is achieved by thinking about their parental role. They won’t live on, but their children and grandchildren will. This viewpoint may explain why men who are reminded of the inevitability of their own death express an interest in having more children (Wisman & Goldenberg, 2005).



TMT further emphasizes that people try to achieve symbolic immortality by thinking of themselves as connected to a broader culture, worldview, and set of values. We will certainly die at some point, but many of the things we value most—our country; freedom and democracy; Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, or Islam; even our alma mater or favorite sports team—will live on long after we do. To the extent that people are closely connected to such institutions, they symbolically live on along with them. Indeed, people tend to vigorously embrace their broader worldview and cultural institutions when reminded of their own inevitable death. In short, one may die in a physical sense but continue to live on symbolically.

But to live on, even symbolically, with a broader cultural institution, we must be a member “in good standing” with the institution—or at least think we are. It’ s only when we feel good about who we are that we can feel meaningfully connected to the institutions and worldviews we care about and thus feel a sense of symbolic immortality. TMT therefore maintains that when our mortality is somehow brought to mind, or made salient, we should be especially concerned with striving to achieve and maintain high self-esteem.

Terror management theorists have tested their ideas by subjecting participants to manipulations intended to make their mortality salient. The most common manipulation is to have participants write out responses to two directives: "Briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your own death arouses in you" and "Jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to *you* as you physically die." In other studies, participants have been asked to fill out surveys in front of a funeral home—a location associated with death—or have been shown pictures of fatal car accidents.

AMERICA
ONE NATION
UNDER GOD

MORTALITY SALIENCE AND NATIONALISM The outpouring of nationalist sentiment during this multidenominational prayer service at Yankee Stadium following the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon may have been partly fueled by the very salient reminder of our own mortality the attacks provided.

Consistent with the tenets of TMT, mortality salience manipulations have been shown to make people more hostile to those who criticize their country (Greenberg et al., 1990), more committed to their ingroups and more hostile to outgroups (Dechesne et al., 2000; Greenberg et al., 1990), more eager to punish those who challenge prevailing laws and established procedures (Rosenblatt et al., 1989), and more reluctant to use cultural artifacts such as a crucifix or the U.S. flag for a mundane, utilitarian purpose (Greenberg et al., 1995). Such data suggest that making death salient makes people want to uphold the values of the institutions they identify with and that will live on after them.

It isn’t hard to think of potential political implications of terror management concerns. For example, in the run-up to the 2004 U.S. presidential election, survey respondents gave their opinions about either the Democratic challenger, John Kerry, or the incumbent Republican, George W. Bush (Landau et al., 2004). Some participants responded after their mortality was made salient, and others did so after writing about their experience with dental pain. Because Bush, as the incumbent president, was the head of the country and was seen by many as the leader of the fight against al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations, the investigators predicted that survey respondents would be more favorable to Bush and less favorable to Kerry after a mortality salience manipulation. As **Figure 6.6** indicates, this prediction was confirmed.

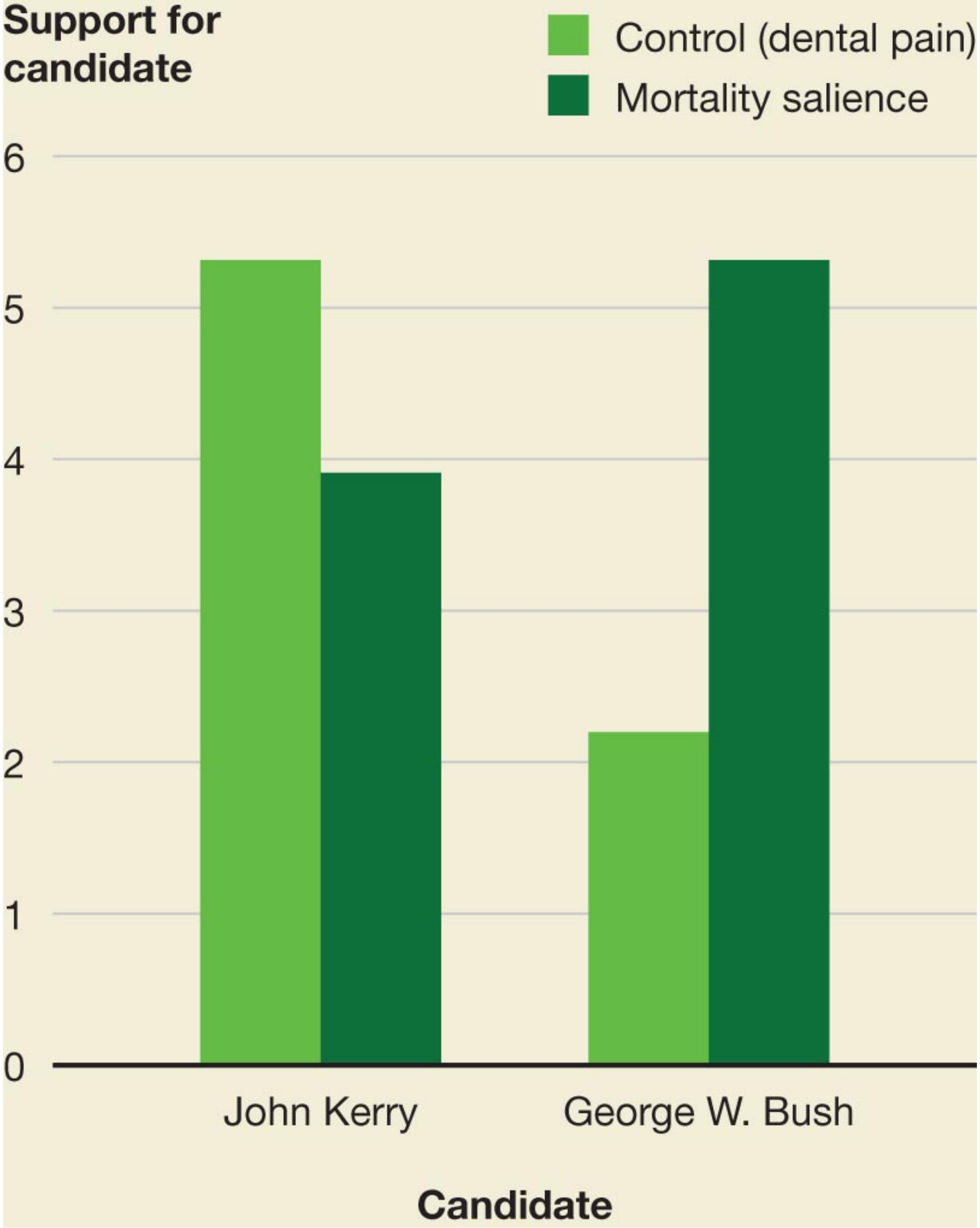


FIGURE 6.6 **MORTALITY SALIENCE AND SUPPORT FOR CANDIDATES IN THE 2004 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION** Survey respondents reported their attitudes toward presidential candidates John Kerry and George W. Bush either under normal survey conditions or after a mortality salience manipulation. (The fact that there was such a strong preference for John Kerry over George W. Bush in the control condition is most

likely attributable to the respondents being students from Brooklyn College.) Source: Adapted from Landau et al., 2004.

There’s also support for TMT’s contention that mortality salience increases striving for self-esteem (Arndt, Schimel, & Goldenberg, 2003; Kasser & Sheldon, 2000; Taubman-Ben-Ari, Florian, & Mikulincer, 1999). In one study, participants read one of two essays on near-death experiences, such as feelings of leaving and looking down at one’s body. In one condition, the essay stated that, according to scientific consensus, such sensations are expected given the makeup of the brain, and they don’t suggest in any way the persistence of life after death (Dechesne et al., 2003). Participants who read the other essay read about how reports of such experiences point to the plausibility of some sort of life after death. Next, all participants received favorable feedback about themselves from unreliable sources, such as horoscopes, and then rated the sources’ validity. Those who read the essay that cast doubt on life after death rated the feedback as more valid than those who read the essay that encouraged belief in an afterlife. In other words, if we can believe there is life after death, we needn’t be so concerned with living on symbolically, so the need for self-esteem is reduced.

The literature on TMT is vast, with literally hundreds of studies yielding findings that are consistent with the core hypotheses of the theory. In part because of the attention this theory has received and the impact it has had, TMT was the focus of a large-scale replication attempt that entailed 21 different labs attempting to replicate the hypothesis that mortality salience increases people’s inclination to defend their worldviews (Klein et al., 2019). Overall, this project failed to replicate the basic effect; this was the case both for studies conducted by researchers who had guidance from

TMT experts in implementing their replication attempts and for studies conducted by researchers who did not have such explicit guidance. This failure to replicate TMT’s worldview defense hypothesis suggests that some caution in evaluating TMT may be warranted. At the same time, it is probably imprudent to view a single set of replication attempts, for which there have been some critiques, as negating the entire corpus of findings on TMT (Chatard, Hirschberger, & Pyszczynski, 2020). Instead, conclusions about what tenets of TMT are and are not replicable, and under what conditions, should await further inquiry.

LOOKING BACK

The tendency to rationalize goes beyond our attempts to resolve personal cognitive inconsistencies. We are motivated to see the broader sociopolitical system in which we live as fair, just, and good. We’re also motivated to deal with the anxiety that arises when our instinct to live is challenged by reminders of our mortality, and we often do so by adhering more closely to our worldviews and finding ways to boost our self-esteem.

Glossary

system justification theory
The theory that people are motivated to see the existing sociopolitical system as desirable, fair, and legitimate.

terror management theory (TMT)
The theory that people deal with the potentially crippling anxiety associated with the inevitability of death by striving for symbolic immortality through

preserving valued cultural worldviews and by believing they have lived up to their culture’s standards.

Chapter Review

SUMMARY

Components and Measurement of Attitudes

- An *attitude* is an evaluation of an object along a positive-negative dimension. It includes three core components: affect (emotion), cognition (thoughts and knowledge), and behavior (the tendency to approach or avoid the object).
- Attitudes can be measured with self-report *Likert scales*. Their strength or importance can be assessed with *response latencies* that capture attitude accessibility (how readily the attitude can become active in an individual’s mind). Attitude linkage measures gauge attitude centrality (how closely an attitude is correlated to attitudes about other issues). *Implicit attitude measures* tap into attitudes that people are unaware they have or may be unwilling to report.

Predicting Behavior From Attitudes

- It can be hard to predict behavior from attitudes because attitudes can conflict with other powerful determinants of behavior. The reasons underlying our attitudes can be difficult to pinpoint. If attitudes are general, they may not predict specific behaviors well.

Predicting Attitudes From Behavior

- Behavior can have substantial effects on attitudes. Cognitive consistency theories emphasize how much people value consistency among their various attitudes and between their attitudes and behavior.
- *Cognitive dissonance theory* is based on the idea that people experience dissonance, or discomfort, when attitudes and behavior are inconsistent. To reduce the dissonance, people try to bring their attitudes in line with their behavior.
- After making a difficult choice between two objects or courses of action, people engage in dissonance reduction by finding new attractions in the chosen alternative and previously undetected flaws in the unchosen alternative.
- People engage in *effort justification* when they exert effort toward a goal that turns out to be disappointing. They justify their expenditure of energy by deciding the goal is truly worthwhile.
- *Induced (forced) compliance* leads to a need to reduce dissonance. When induced to argue for a position at variance with their true attitudes, those who are poorly compensated feel they must justify their behavior. They typically do so by changing their attitudes to align better with their behavior.
- Inconsistency between attitudes and behavior should produce dissonance only when there is free choice (or the illusion of it) to engage in the behavior, when there is insufficient justification for the behavior, when the behavior has negative consequences, and when the consequences were foreseeable.
- People can offset or reduce the negative effects of psychological inconsistency—and of threats to self-identity and self-esteem more generally—by engaging in self-affirmation: affirming other important elements of their identity, such as their values.
- Dissonance is apparently universal, but there are cultural differences in the conditions that prompt people to experience it. Japanese people, for instance, tend to

experience post-decision dissonance only when asked to think about what another person would choose.

Self-Perception Theory

- *Self-perception theory* is based on the premise that people change their attitudes to align with their behavior because they observe their behavior and the circumstances in which it occurs and then infer, just as an observer might, what their attitudes must be.
- Whereas self-perception may play a role in generating the effects in some dissonance experiments, evidence indicates that there is often a motivational component as well. Self-perception appears to account for attitude change when attitudes are weak or unclear to begin with, and more motivated dissonance reduction is invoked when attitudes are more strongly held.
- Bodily sensations are often incorporated into people’s judgments about an object or appraisals of a situation.

Beyond Cognitive Consistency to Broader Rationalization

- According to *system justification theory*, people are motivated to justify the broader sociopolitical system in which they live. One method of justification is through stereotypes that play up the advantages of belonging to relatively disadvantaged groups, such as the belief that poor people are happier than wealthy people.
- The certainty of mortality can elicit paralyzing anxiety. *Terror management theory* maintains that people often cope with this anxiety by striving for symbolic immortality through their offspring, through their identification with institutions and cultural worldviews that live on after their own death, and by striving for self-esteem as a means of maintaining good standing in society.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Consider an attitude object you feel strongly about, something you love or something you hate. Maybe you’re passionate about soccer. Perhaps you are staunchly opposed to capital punishment. Describe this attitude in terms of the three elements of affect, cognition, and behavior.
2. Suppose you’re an attitude researcher and want to assess participant attitudes about the institution of marriage. Describe three methods you might use in your assessment.
3. You have two close friends whom you like very much, Tanya and Amanda. Unfortunately, Tanya can’t stand Amanda. This makes your life difficult, as the three of you can never spend time together without Tanya getting irritated. Based on what you learned about cognitive dissonance theory, how might you go about getting Tanya to like Amanda more?
4. Although we readily assume that attitudes relate in meaningful ways to behavior, research suggests they don’t always match up. Consider the dentist as the attitude object. Why might attitudes toward the dentist not necessarily predict behavioral responses to the dentist?
5. Suppose you’re choosing between two vacation spots you think are equally amazing: Greece and Costa Rica. You have to pick one, and you elect to go to Costa Rica. Following your decision, Costa Rica starts to sound even more fantastic—zip-lining, cloud forests, and incredible wildlife. In contrast, Greece seems a little less special: It’s expensive, and the beaches aren’t really that nice. According to cognitive dissonance theory, how might you account for this change in your attitude following the decision?

6. Although your son already likes vegetables, you want him to eat even more of them. You decide to pay him $1 to spend at the toy store for every portion of vegetables he eats. Given what you learned about self-perception theory, is this a good approach? Why or why not?

The answer guidelines for the Think About It questions can be found at the back of the book . . .

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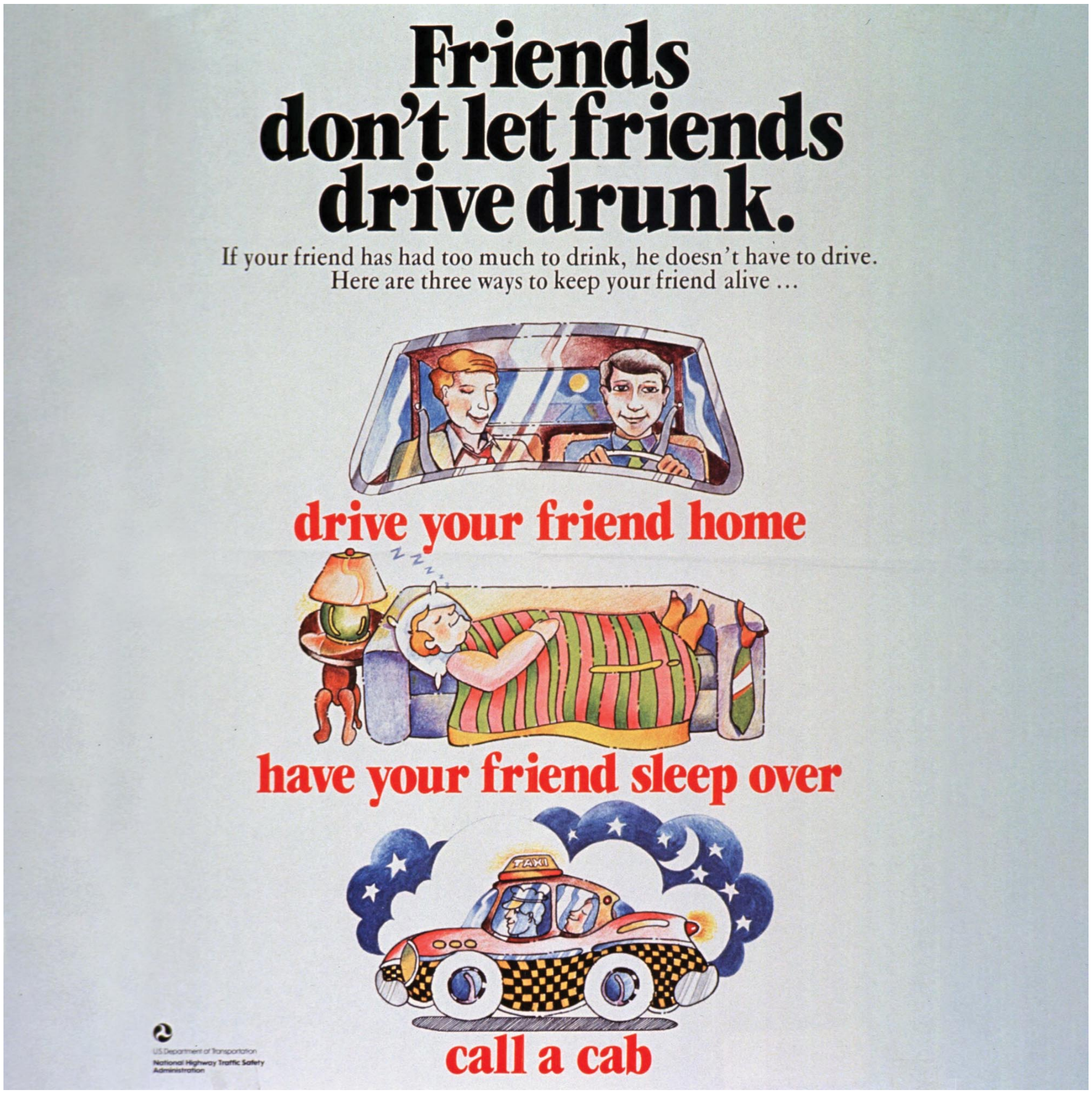
CHAPTER
7

Persuasion

What characteristics made Martin Luther King Jr., such a credible source of persuasion?


Friends don't let friends drive drunk.

If your friend has had too much to drink, he doesn't have to drive.
Here are three ways to keep your friend alive …

drive your friend home
have your friend sleep over
TAXI
call a cab
U.S. Department of Transportation
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Why are some campaigns more effective at changing behavior than others?

THE LOST VI
SMURFS
THE LOST VILLAG
unicef
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT G
E LOST VILLAG
THE LOS
D NA
UNDATI
3
GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
unicef
UNITED NATIONS FOUNDATION
SMURFS
THE LOST VILLAGE
#SmallSmurfsBigGoals
6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Why are we more likely to support social causes endorsed by celebrities?

OUTLINE

- Dual-Process Approach to Persuasion
- The Elements of Persuasion
- The Media and Persuasion
- Resistance to Persuasion

IN 1985, “DON’T MESS WITH TEXAS” bumper stickers began to appear on cars in Texas, signaling the launch of what turned out to be the most successful anti-littering campaign ever conducted in the United States. The campaign, commissioned by the Texas Department of Transportation, was aimed at reducing the cost of picking up roadside litter. Research showed that the main culprits were young, male truck drivers. Aware of the demographic they were targeting, the advertising team had an epiphany. Since most Texans associated the word *litter* with a group of puppies or kittens, a campaign on “littering” wasn’t going to work. The campaign needed a motto that would resonate with the likes of the rough-and-tumble men who thought nothing of throwing their empty beer cans out their truck windows. The slogan “Don’t mess with Texas” was born.

The slogan not only fit the sensibilities of the target demographic; it also capitalized on a well-known fact—enormous Texan pride. The advertising team astutely recruited iconic Texan men to disseminate the anti-littering message. Members of the Dallas Cowboys, singers such as Willie Nelson and Lyle Lovett, and the actor Matthew McConaughey were among the first to participate. The spokespersons for the campaign did not plead; instead, rugged football players looked sternly into the camera as they crushed beer cans, threw them into the garbage, and proclaimed: “Don’t mess with Texas!”

The “Don’t mess with Texas” campaign is a legendary success story in the world of advertising. It’s also a story about the psychology of persuasion—how to influence people’s attitudes and behaviors. The campaign’s success suggests that large numbers of people can be persuaded—a phenomenon we have seen throughout history. Charismatic leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., and Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi have stirred the masses and brought about radical social change, even without significant institutional power or money. In 2014, the “Ice Bucket Challenge,” a promotional strategy aimed at combating the neurodegenerative condition ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis), became a craze that spread worldwide. In addition to raising awareness about the disease, the campaign persuaded people to donate, and it ultimately took in over $115 million in support of groundbreaking ALS research. Throughout the spring and summer of 2020, the majority of Americans reported changing their behavior (e.g., wearing masks, avoiding mass transportation, minimizing non-household social interactions) to adhere to COVID-19-related social distancing guidelines issued by local and federal agencies.

ADVERTISING SUCCESS In 1985, on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation, an advertising agency launched an anti-littering campaign centered around the slogan “Don’t mess with Texas.” This strategy reduced litter by 72 percent within six years. The campaign’s visibility has continued in the years since, as seen in this 2015 photo of workers removing a large ball of trash from the lawn of the Texas Capitol in Austin. The ball of trash was used as a prop by the Texas Department of Transportation to launch new announcements as part of the “Don’t mess with Texas” campaign.

People can be remarkably resistant to persuasion, however. Many well-designed, well-funded efforts to encourage people to practice safe sex, stop using drugs, or improve their diet have failed (Aronson, Fried, & Stone, 1991). People can be stubbornly resistant to changing their minds, even when their health or economic well-being is affected. It can be hard to change people’s minds, even when their health or economic well-being depends on their doing so. ■

Dual-Process Approach to Persuasion

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Explain the two basic routes to persuasion—central versus peripheral—and how they differ.
- Describe the role of motivation and ability in determining whether persuasion occurs via the central or peripheral route.

More than 97 percent of active climate scientists believe that people are the chief cause of the warming of the Earth’s atmosphere and that global warming will likely yield catastrophic events—hurricanes more powerful than we’ve ever seen, rising sea levels that will submerge parts of the U.S. South and many tropical islands, rampant wildfires, and the disappearance of thousands of species. It’s also clear that each of us can do many things to cut our own carbon emissions, a primary source of global warming. Here are just a few:

- We can drive our cars less and rely more on bikes or public transportation.
- We can fly less often to our vacation destinations.
- We can eliminate red meat from our diet (you’d be surprised how much that can help).
- We can use energy-efficient light bulbs, toilets, heating systems, and solar panels—all of which currently cost more than the conventional options but will yield many benefits in the long run.

- We can turn off computers and lights when not in use.
- We can buy local produce or grow our own food (which helps reduce carbon emissions because trucking isn’t required to deliver the food).

Imagine you’re leading a public service campaign to persuade people to adopt these habits. Doing so might not be as difficult as, say, getting people to change their sexual practices to curb AIDS, which some African countries have tried with limited success. Still, there are plenty of barriers to modifying attitudes and behavior related to cutting carbon emissions. People would have to alter old habits (taking public transportation or biking to work instead of driving) and give up strong preferences (double cheeseburgers). What kind of campaign would you design? The literature on persuasion suggests that there is no simple, one-solution-fits-all means of persuasion. Instead, social psychologists propose that there are two basic ways to persuade people—that is, two “routes” to persuasion.

> “The object of oratory alone is not truth, but persuasion.”
>
> —THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY

Elaboration Likelihood Model

In the 1980s, Richard Petty and John Cacioppo developed the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) to explain how people change their attitudes in response to persuasive messages (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979, 1984, 1986; for related theorizing, see Chaiken, 1980; Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989). The core idea is that people sometimes process persuasive messages rather mindlessly and effortlessly and on other occasions deeply and attentively. Does this notion of dual processes sound familiar? It should. It’s analogous to the distinction we made in Chapters 1 and 4 between automatic and controlled processing. When applied to persuasion, the key insight is that some types of persuasive appeals will be more effective when the target audience is largely on “autopilot,” and other types will be more effective when the target audience is alert and attentive. Indeed, the very name “elaboration likelihood model” captures the idea that in trying to predict whether a persuasive message will be effective, it’s essential to know whether the target audience is likely to “elaborate”—think deeply about— the message or process it mindlessly.

According to the ELM, the central route to persuasion occurs when people think carefully and deliberately about the content of a persuasive message (**Figure 7.1**). They attend to the logic and strength of the arguments and evidence presented in the message, and they rely on relevant information of their own—experiences, memories, and knowledge—to evaluate the message. Whether or not all of this high-effort thinking, or elaboration of the message, actually leads to attitude change, the central route involves a careful sifting of the arguments and evidence presented.

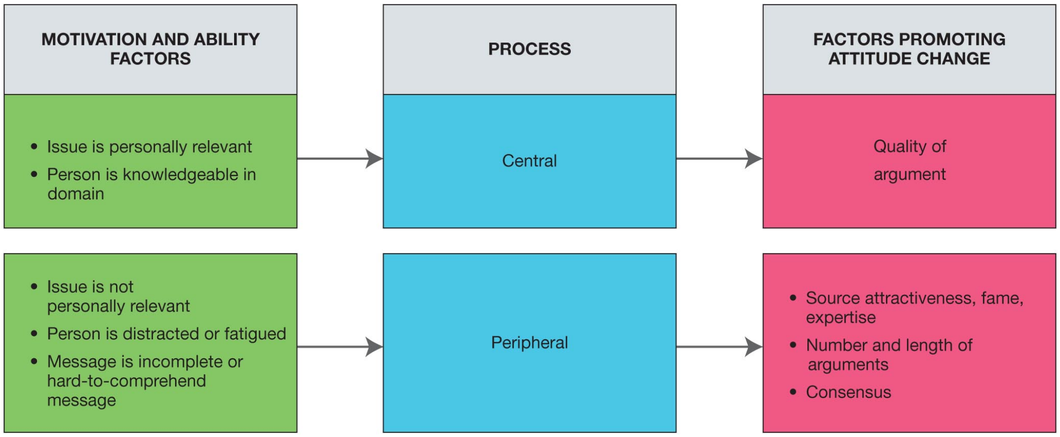

MOTIVATION AND ABILITY FACTORS
PROCESS
FACTORS PROMOTING ATTITUDE CHANGE
• Issue is personally relevant
• Person is knowledgeable in domain
Central
Quality of argument
• Issue is not personally relevant
• Person is distracted or fatigued
• Message is incomplete or hard-to-comprehend message
Peripheral
• Source attractiveness, fame, expertise
• Number and length of arguments
• Consensus

FIGURE 7.1 **DUAL-PROCESS APPROACH TO PERSUASION** According to Petty and Cacioppo’s elaboration likelihood model,

> there are two routes to persuasion: a central route and a peripheral route. The routes are determined by different levels of motivation and ability to attend to the message, and different types of persuasive appeals are more effective through one route than through the other. Any persuasion variable, such as a source’s expertise, can bring about attitude change through either or both central and peripheral routes to persuasion.

Through the ELM’s peripheral route, people primarily attend to peripheral aspects of a message—relatively superficial, easy-to-process features of a communication that are tangential to the persuasive information itself. A peripheral cue might be the apparent expertise, credibility, or attractiveness of the person communicating a persuasive message. To be sure, some of these peripheral cues, such as the communicator’s expertise or credibility, can also be a form of evidence when processed in a deliberate, thoughtful fashion. But when persuasion occurs through the peripheral route, the person is swayed by these cues without engaging in much thought.

> “Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or the apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself.”
>
> —ARISTOTLE

In the peripheral route, people rely on relatively simple heuristics, or rules of thumb, that guide their response to a persuasive message. Thus, a person's attitude toward red meat might change simply because "an expert says it's bad to eat it," "there are many arguments against eating it," or "a lot of people don't eat it." Or a peripheral cue might change a person's emotional reaction to the attitude object (the focus of the persuasive appeal), leading to a change in attitude on this basis alone. If the source of a message is an attractive celebrity, for instance, the person might feel more positively about the attitude object simply because the celebrity elicits general feelings of liking or attraction that rub off on the object itself.

The Roles of Motivation and Ability

Two factors are particularly important in determining whether we will engage in central or peripheral processing in response to a persuasive message: motivation and ability (see Figure 7.1). When a message has personal consequences—that is, when it bears on our goals, interests, or well-being—we're more likely to be motivated to go the central route and carefully work through the arguments and relevant information. When we have sufficient cognitive resources and time, we're able to process persuasive messages more deeply. And in general, the more we know, the more thoughtfully we can scrutinize a persuasive message (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

In contrast, when ability is low—for example, when the arguments in a persuasive message are presented too quickly or are hard to comprehend—we're more apt to rely on easy-to-process peripheral cues associated with the message, such as the credentials of the message source (Petty & Wegener, 1998). Being tired or distracted also makes peripheral processing more likely. The upshot is that for persuasion to occur via the central route, we have to be both motivated and able to engage in more in-depth processing. If either is lacking, persuasion is generally based on peripheral cues.

In a typical experiment testing the ELM, researchers first generate strong and weak arguments for an attitude issue or object. They then present these arguments as part of a persuasive message. They also vary the potency of various peripheral cues associated with the message, such as the number of arguments offered or the credibility or attractiveness of the source of the message. Finally, they vary a factor, such as the personal relevance of the issue, to manipulate the likelihood that the participants will process the message centrally or peripherally.

BOX 7.1

Not So Fast: **Critical Thinking About External Validity**

In 1990, the rock band Judas Priest was tried in court for contributing to the suicides of Ray Belknap and James Vance. Prosecutors alleged that Belknap and Vance had been led down the path to suicide by a subliminal message— “Do it” —that the band had embedded into one of its songs. Can subliminal messages have such powerful effects? Can they be the basis of a nonconscious, peripheral route to persuasion?

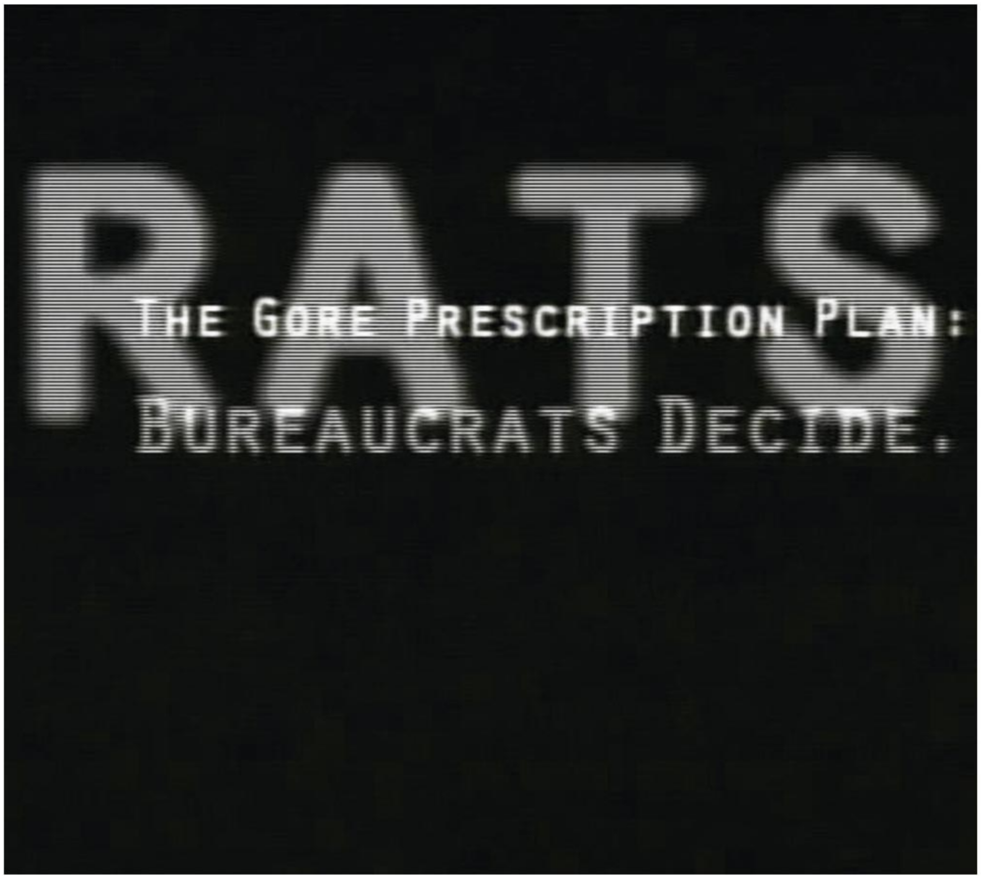
Subliminal stimuli—stimuli presented below conscious awareness—can activate certain concepts and even shape everyday thoughts, feelings, and actions (Dijksterhuis, Aarts, & Smith, 2005). Consider a laboratory experiment in which participants saw pictures of a target person immediately after being subliminally presented with a pleasant image (such as a child playing with a doll) or an unpleasant one (such as a bloody shark). When evaluating the target person, those who were subliminally exposed to positive images provided more favorable evaluations than those exposed to negative images (Krosnick et al., 1992).

In another study, participants were told not to drink anything for 3 hours before coming to the experiment (Strahan, Spencer, & Zanna, 2002). Upon arrival, half the participants were allowed to quench their thirst and half were kept thirsty. All of them were then subliminally primed, some with words related to thirst (*thirst*, *dry*) and some with neutral words (*pirate*, *won*). They were then allowed to drink as much as they wanted of each of two beverages. Thirsty participants who were primed with thirst-related words drank significantly more than thirsty participants primed with neutral words. (As the researchers expected, the primes had no influence on those who weren’t thirsty.)

Findings like these are provocative and attest to the potential influence of subliminal messages on our decisions and behaviors. But are they cause for alarm? Do we need to be on constant alert for the possibility that advertisers, political campaign managers, or rock bands might try to alter our behavior with messages we aren't consciously aware of having seen or heard? Maybe not. Recall Chapter 2's discussion of internal and external validity. Many laboratory experiments on subliminal persuasion score high on internal validity; that is, they're constructed well enough to demonstrate what they are intended to. But such experiments are considerably lower on external validity. The outside world and the lab differ in ways that tend to make subliminal effects relatively weak in daily life.

For example, the focus of a persuasion attempt in the lab is typically something people have no firm opinion about, such as a new sports drink. It's one thing to shift attitudes and behavior toward neutral stimuli; it's another thing entirely to shift attitudes and behavior toward more familiar, psychologically significant stimuli—such as getting Republicans to vote for a Democratic candidate. In addition, the subliminal message in lab studies is presented right before assessment of the target attitude or behavior, and the participants encounter no competing messages in the interim. That's almost never the case in the real world. A subliminal command to "Drink Coke" during a movie screening could conceivably motivate people to leave their seats to get a drink. But once in the theater lobby, surrounded by all sorts of messages, they might be as likely to drink Pepsi as Coke or even to get a candy bar.

In fact, no studies have ever demonstrated that a subliminal stimulus induces people to do something they are opposed to doing. There's no reason to believe that being subliminally primed with the words "Do it" would in itself lead people to kill themselves. The relevant lesson is that while experiments can shed light on potential attitudes and behaviors (while revealing a lot about how the mind works in the process), broad conclusions about the likelihood of a behavior or outcome occurring in daily life require a thoughtful consideration of the external validity of the body of experimental evidence.



SUBLIMINAL ADVERTISING In a television ad run by Republicans during the 2000 U.S. presidential election, the word *RATS* was quickly flashed on the screen in a subliminal attack on Al Gore, the Democratic candidate, and his Medicare plan.

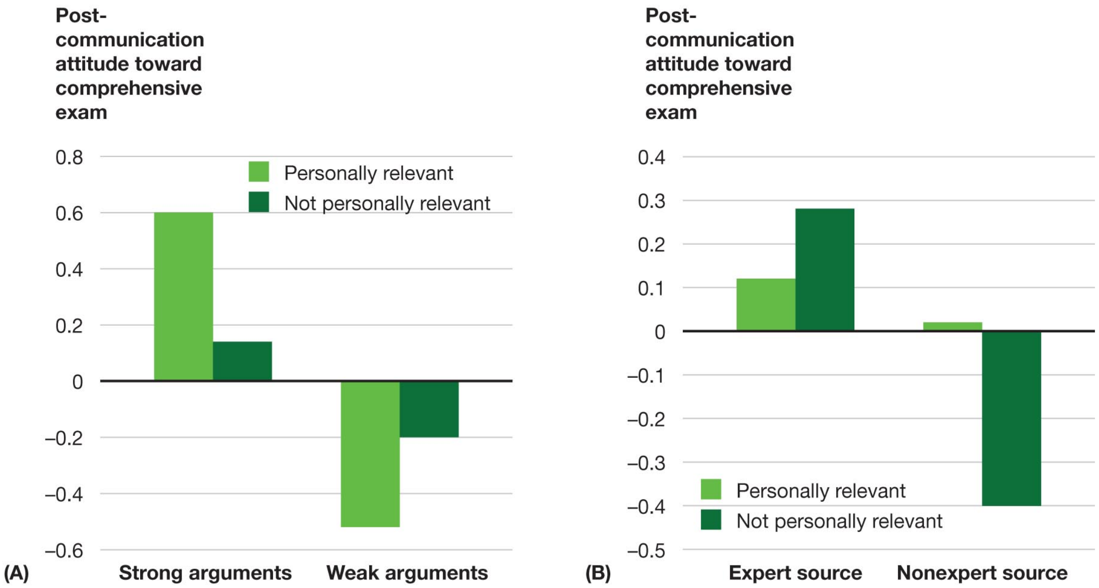
If participants process the message via the central route because the issue has a great deal of personal relevance, they should be sensitive to the strength of the arguments—

that is, they should be swayed when the arguments are strong but not when they’re weak (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In contrast, participants who are low in motivation or ability (or both) would be unlikely to discern the strength of the arguments because they’re only processing peripheral cues of the message. Whether or not they change their attitudes is therefore less affected by argument strength.

Given this reasoning, consider one study that varied the strength of the arguments, the personal relevance of the issue, and a peripheral cue—namely, the expertise of the person delivering the persuasive message. Students were asked to consider the implementation of a policy that would require all graduating seniors at their university to take a comprehensive exam. They read either eight strong arguments (e.g., institution of the exams has led to a reversal in declining scores on standardized achievement tests at other universities) or eight weak arguments (e.g., a friend of the author’s had to take a comprehensive exam and now has a prestigious academic position) in support of the policy (Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981). The researchers manipulated personal relevance by telling the participants that the policy would be initiated either the following year (meaning participants themselves would have to take the exam) or in ten years (presumably well after the participants’ graduation). Finally, source expertise was varied: Researchers told half the participants that the arguments were generated by a local high school class, and they told the other half that the arguments came from the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, allegedly chaired by a Princeton University professor.

In **Figure 7.2A**, higher values along the vertical *y*-axis indicate more favorable attitudes toward the comprehensive exam, whereas lower values indicate less favorable attitudes. You can see that when the message was personally relevant to the students—that is, when the exam was to be implemented the next year and these students would have to take it—they were motivated to pay attention to the strength of the arguments, and the arguments' strength played a big role in whether they were persuaded. But among students for whom the message was *not* personally relevant—because they wouldn't have to take the test themselves—the strength of the arguments didn't matter very much. These participants noticed, and were mainly influenced by, the expertise of the source—whether the arguments were produced by a high school class or by a professorial committee (**Figure 7.2B**). Students who would theoretically have to take the test the following year were far less influenced by whether or not the source was an expert and more persuaded by strong than by weak arguments. In short, high personal relevance led participants to be persuaded by the strength of the arguments (the central route to persuasion), whereas a lack of personal relevance led participants to be persuaded by the expertise of the source (the peripheral route to persuasion).

It's worth noting, though, that variables influencing persuasion, such as argument strength and source expertise, are not tied to a single persuasion route. In fact, the variables can play multiple roles and may influence persuasion through either the central or the peripheral route, depending on the circumstances (S. Chen & Chaiken, 1999; Lee & Koo, 2016; Petty, 1997; Petty & Briñol, 2008).



Strong arguments lead to more attitude change for participants to whom the issue is personally relevant than for those to whom the issue is not relevant.

The expertise of the source of the communication, in contrast, matters more for participants to whom the issue is not personally relevant, suggesting that they mainly attend to peripheral aspects of the message.

FIGURE 7.2 **CENTRAL OR PERIPHERAL ROUTE TO PERSUASION** Attitude change can be brought about by (A) strong arguments when people are motivated and by (B) the expertise of the source of the persuasive message when people aren't motivated. Source: Adapted from Petty & Cacioppo, 1986.

For example, the expertise of the person delivering a persuasive message is often readily discerned and may therefore easily change someone's attitude without engaging a thoughtful response—persuasion via the peripheral route. But if someone is highly motivated and has the ability to think carefully, source expertise could function as an argument whose strength is carefully evaluated. This extra processing results in more mindful attitude change—persuasion via the central route. Source expertise can also affect persuasion through the central route by influencing the thoughts people generate about the issue at hand (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994; Tormala, Briñol, & Petty, 2007). For example, people may be more likely to think about supportive evidence if the source is an expert.

Of these two basic routes to persuasion, is one more effective than the other? For long-lasting attitude change, persuasion through the central route, involving systematic elaboration of the persuasive arguments, is preferable. Through this route, people attend to a message carefully and elaborate on it more deeply, increasing the chance that they will integrate the arguments into their belief system. The end result is attitude change that is more enduring, more resistant to persuasion, and more predictive of future behavior (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Mackie, 1987; Petty, Haugtvedt, & Smith, 1995). By contrast, to influence an audience that is not very motivated or attentive, the peripheral route, characterized by less effortful processing of relatively superficial cues, is the way to go.

LOOKING BACK

The ELM describes two ways of processing persuasive messages. When motivation and ability are high (such as when the issue is personally relevant and there are minimal distractions), persuasion is likely to occur through the central route, whereby people are persuaded on the basis of a careful, systematic analysis of the content of a message, including the strength of its arguments. When motivation and ability are low, attitude change tends to occur through the peripheral route, whereby people are persuaded by easy-to-process cues, such as the sheer number of arguments or the attractiveness of the message source.

Glossary

elaboration likelihood model (ELM)

A model of persuasion that maintains that there are two routes to persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route.

central route

A route to persuasion wherein people think carefully and deliberately about the content of a persuasive message, attending to its logic and the strength of its arguments as well as to related evidence and principles.

peripheral route

A route to persuasion wherein people attend to relatively easy-to-process, superficial cues related to a persuasive message, such as its length or the expertise or attractiveness of the source of the message.

The Elements of Persuasion

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe the basic elements of persuasion—the source, content, and audience of a persuasive message—and give examples of each.
- Explain how different elements of persuasion make persuasion more likely to occur via the peripheral versus the central route.

Now that you have a sense of the different ways people can process a persuasive message, let’s take a look at specific elements that influence whether a persuasive attempt works and whether it’s likely to do so through the peripheral or central route. Many of the studies in this area were inspired by research conducted by Carl Hovland and his colleagues at Yale University in the 1940s and 1950s, who were interested in understanding the Nazi propaganda campaigns before and during WWII (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). These researchers broke down persuasion into three elements, or the three W’s of persuasion: (1) the “who,” or source of the message; (2) the “what,” or content of the message; and (3) the “to whom,” or intended audience of the message.

Source Characteristics

Spokespeople for social causes are often rich, famous, and good-looking. For example, actor Matt Damon is cofounder of and spokesperson for Water.org, an organization devoted to providing clean water to impoverished countries. Singersongwriter Demi Lovato has lent their name and influence to many social causes, among them the promotion of health and well-being. What are the effects of having such striking spokespeople? The attractiveness of the person who delivers a persuasive message is just one of the source characteristics that psychologists have researched.

ATTRACTIVENESS The handsome, award-winning actor George Clooney has spoken on behalf of many causes, among them the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, Sudan. Glamorous celebrities often appear in commercials singing the praises of a particular consumer product or brand. They’re also the faces of public service announcements urging kids to read, stay in school, or avoid drugs. As Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests spread across the United States after the murder of George Floyd in 2020, actress Selena Gomez handed over her Instagram account to BLM activists, thus lending her celebrity clout to increase attention to Black voices and the movement. Grammy winner Billie Eilish spoke out against the common “All Lives Matter” retort to the BLM movement. And during the 2020 surge in COVID-19 cases, celebrities like Kerry Washington, Jennifer Aniston, and Tracee Ellis Ross joined forces to encourage mask wearing as part of the #WearADamnMask campaign. One could argue that relying on the beautiful and famous in these campaigns makes no sense. After all, what do beauty and charisma have to do with the merits of a cause or the quality of a product? But attractive communicators can promote attitude change through the peripheral route. For example, we tend to like physically attractive people (see Chapter 9), and for good or ill, this simple fact makes us more likely to accept the attitudes they endorse.

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PERSUASION AND CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS Demi Lovato is pictured here at the United Nations headquarters celebrating International Day of Happiness. The annual event is part of a worldwide movement to increase recognition that happiness and well-being are as important to progress as economic growth.

Research shows that attractive sources are particularly persuasive when the message isn’t personally important to the people hearing it and when those people don’t have much knowledge in the domain; in other words, the attractiveness of a source is especially persuasive under circumstances that sway people to focus on peripheral cues (Chaiken, 1980; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983; Wood & Kallgren, 1988). This doesn’t mean that finding an attractive person to deliver a persuasive message is a waste of time when your audience is apt to be thinking about the message carefully. Attractive sources can lead to persuasion through the central route by, for example, making people’s effortful thinking more favorable toward the position being endorsed. In short, it’s hard to go wrong with having someone attractive deliver your persuasive message.

CREDIBILITY Credible sources are persuasive because they seem expert and trustworthy. Advertisers try to take advantage of this. For example, there’s no shortage of ads for toothpaste, aspirin, and other health-related products that cite testimonials from doctors, who are generally considered to be knowledgeable and trustworthy. More generally, the credibility of a message’s source alone can sway opinions under circumstances that promote the peripheral route to persuasion, such as when the topic is of low personal relevance to the audience or when the audience is distracted (Cooper, Blackman, & Keller, 2016; Kiesler & Mathog, 1968; Petty et al., 1981; Rhine & Severance, 1970). And when the audience happens to be highly motivated and able to think carefully, source credibility can be taken as a strong argument in favor of moving toward the position the source is endorsing. Martin Luther King Jr.’s credibility as a leader of the Civil Rights Movement undoubtedly served as a factor in persuading people to join the movement and to act in ways that would increase its impact.

What about all the noncredible messengers who crowd the airwaves these days—those maintaining that the Holocaust never happened or that AIDS is not caused by sexual contact? Do these messages fall on deaf ears? An early study unfortunately suggests otherwise (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). In this experiment, participants first rated the likelihood that a nuclear submarine would be built in the near future (at the time, they didn’t exist). Five days later, participants read an essay arguing that nuclear submarines would soon be constructed, and they were told the essay was written either by the highly credible physicist Robert Oppenheimer, the “father of the atomic bomb,” or by a noncredible journalist who worked for *Pravda*, the propaganda newspaper of the former Soviet Union. As you might expect, the Oppenheimer essay led to greater attitude change than the essay by the less credible *Pravda* writer, even though the content of the essay was exactly the same.

CREDIBILITY AND PERSUASION Martin Luther King Jr., is pictured here during the March on Washington in August 1963 as he is about to give his “I Have a Dream” speech. His credibility, due to his leading role in the Civil Rights Movement and having repeatedly put his life on the line, undoubtedly contributed to his ability to persuade.

Much more surprising, however, was that four weeks later, participants who had read the essay by the *Pravda* writer, although unmoved initially, actually shifted their attitudes toward the position he advocated. This came to be known as the sleeper effect—that is, messages from unreliable sources exert little influence initially but over time have the potential to shift people’s attitudes (Kumkale & Albarracín, 2004; Pratkanis et al., 1988). The idea is that over time, people dissociate the source of the message from the message itself. Let’s say, for instance, that you hear some random guy on talk radio arguing that the government is preparing to ban the sale of handguns. Initially, you discount the message because of the messenger’s lack of credibility. But over time, the message has a chance to influence your views because you have dissociated the source of the message from its content. Down the road, the idea may not seem entirely far-fetched.

Notice here that we’re talking about how the ineffectiveness of a noncredible source can fade over time, allowing a message from such a source to shift attitudes later on. So what happens when a highly credible source is linked to a weak message? The weakness of the message will surely hurt persuasion initially, but could the precise content of the message become dissociated from the credible source over time so that persuasion is effective in the longer run solely because of the source’s credibility? Indeed it can. Recent studies document this new form of sleeper effect whereby a credible source who is initially linked to a weak message can be persuasive down the road if the content of the message becomes dissociated from the source (Albarracín, Kumkale, & Poyner-Del Vento, 2017).

CERTAINTY Imagine there are two online reviews of a new restaurant. According to one of the reviews, “This is absolutely the best Italian meal you’ll ever have.” The other review reads, “I don’t know, but I kinda feel like maybe this could be the best Italian meal you’ll ever have.” If you’re like most people, you’d be far more inclined to try the restaurant if you read the first review. This simple example illustrates that sources who express their views with certainty and confidence tend to be more persuasive. People generally judge certain and confident sources to be more credible, and as we’ve seen, source credibility is persuasive.

By and large, then, if your goal is to persuade someone, it wouldn’t be a bad idea to express confidence in your viewpoint (Akhtar & Wheeler, 2016; Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010;

Tenney et al., 2007). Research conducted in various real-world contexts supports this idea. For example, studies of jurors show that people judge the credibility of eyewitnesses based on the confidence they express when they give their testimony (Wells, Ferguson, & Lindsay 1981), even though the actual association between eyewitness confidence and accuracy is rather weak (Kassin, 1985). In a similar vein, people regard financial advisers who express high confidence in their stock forecasts as more knowledgeable than those who express less confidence, and clients accordingly choose the more confident advisers more frequently (P. C. Price & Stone, 2004).

Message Characteristics

What message characteristics make a persuasive appeal most effective? By now you should be able to anticipate the answer from the perspective of the ELM: It depends on the audience’s motivation and ability to process the message.

MESSAGE QUALITY As you saw in Figure 7.1, high-quality messages are more persuasive in general, especially for people who are strong in motivation and ability. Messages are stronger when they appeal to the audience’s core values (Cacioppo, Petty, & Sidera, 1982); when they’re straightforward, clear, and logical; and when they articulate the desirable consequences of taking the actions suggested by the message (Leippe & Elkin, 1987).

More attitude change will result if the message makes its conclusions explicit (Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949): “Here’s the takeaway.” And it’s usually a good idea to pointedly refute the opposition, thereby giving the receiver of the message material to use in arguing against any opposing messages (Hass & Linder, 1972; Petty & Wegener, 1998). Finally, messages are more persuasive when sources argue against their own self-interest (Wallace, Wegener, & Petty, 2020). For example, Elaine Walster, Elliot Aronson, and Darcy

Abrahams (1966) found that a message delivered by a prison inmate advocating longer prison sentences was more persuasive than a message in which the same prisoner argued for shorter sentences. When someone argues for a position contrary to obvious self-interest, the source of the message is seen as more sincere. A real-world example of this is that of Patrick Reynolds, heir to the second-largest tobacco company in the United States. Reynolds’ s anti-smoking advocacy is likely seen as more sincere because it goes against his own self-interest.

ARGUING AGAINST SELF-INTEREST Patrick Reynolds, the grandson and heir of the late R. J. Reynolds (founder of the second-largest tobacco company in the United States), is shown speaking to students about the dangers of smoking. He watched his father and older brother die of emphysema and lung cancer brought on by cigarette smoking. His anti-

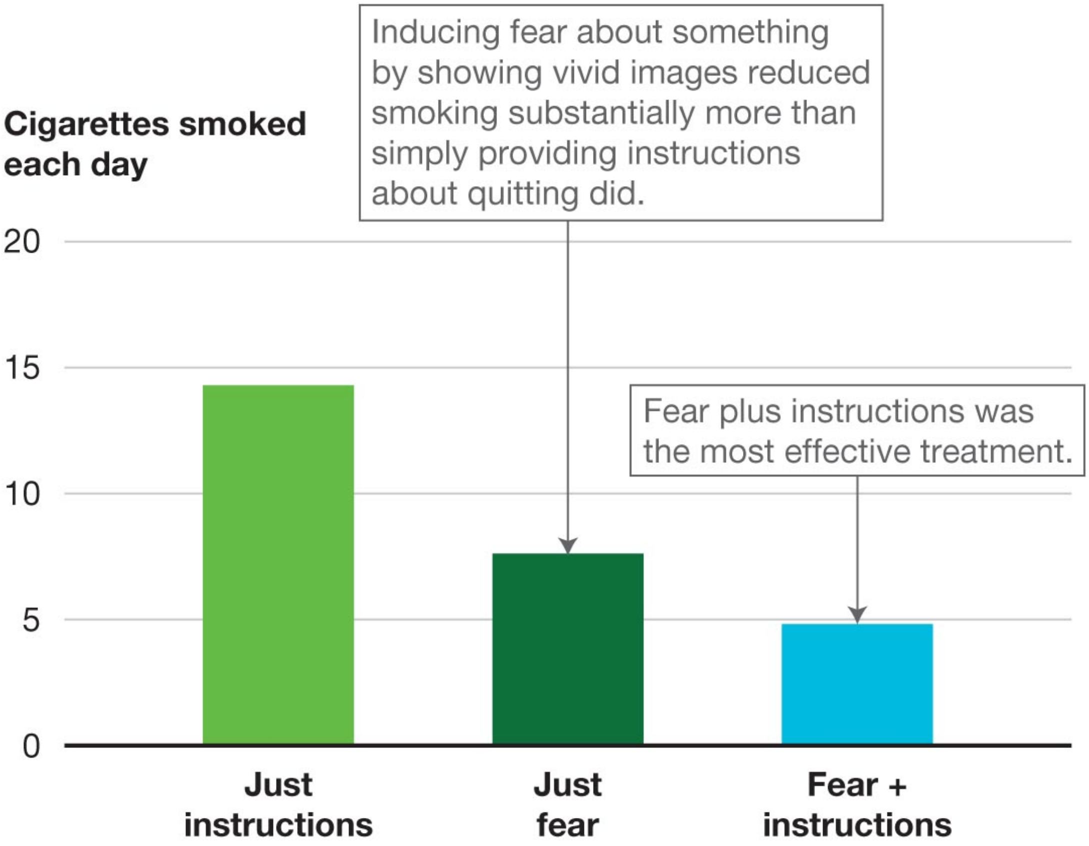
> smoking speeches have high credibility given his family history and the fact that his arguments, if effective, would ultimately reduce his inheritance.

VIVIDNESS When information is vivid—colorful, interesting, and memorable—it tends to be more effective (Blondé & Girandola, 2016; see also Chaiken & Eagly, 1983). In fact, vivid information can affect people's judgments even when it is known to be atypical (and hence misleading). In one study (Hamill, Wilson, & Nisbett, 1980), participants read a vivid story about a long-term welfare recipient who exploited the system to live an easy life at the taxpayers' expense. The story was based on the "welfare queen" trope often repeated by former U.S. president Ronald Reagan. Some participants who read the story were given statistics indicating that the woman was typical; others were given statistics indicating that she was atypical. It didn't matter. The subsequent attitudes of these two groups of participants toward welfare were virtually identical. The vivid story led participants to have negative views of welfare even when the less vivid statistical information made it clear (or should have made it clear) that the woman was not representative of most welfare recipients. More recent studies suggest a number of nuances to the effects of vividness on persuasion. For example, for vividness to have an impact, it's important to make the thesis or central argument of a persuasive message vivid, rather than the whole message or irrelevant, background features of the message (Guadagno, Rhoads, & Sagarin, 2011).

Related to the impact of vivid messages on persuasion is the identifiable victim effect. Vivid, flesh-and-blood victims are often more powerful sources of persuasion than abstract statistics are (R. L. Collins et al., 1988; Shedler & Manis, 1986; S. E. Taylor & Thompson, 1982). People are more willing to donate to a cause when an appeal is made on behalf of an identifiable individual than when one is made on behalf of anonymous or statistical victims (Jenni & Loewenstein, 1997; Small, Loewenstein, & Slovic, 2007). Recognizable victims are more apt to elicit feelings of empathy, thereby leading to a willingness to donate to worthy causes (Kogut & Ritov, 2005; Ritov & Kogut, 2011). The identifiable victim effect has limitations, however. For example, Tehila Kogut (2011) has shown that in cases where it’s possible to blame a victim for the situation, making the person identifiable can actually breed negative perceptions of the victim and decrease rather than increase aid.

THE IDENTIFIABLE VICTIM EFFECT People are more inclined to be persuaded to act on behalf of a cause by portrayals of clearly identifiable victims, such as the children in this compelling ad for UNICEF.

FEAR Suppose you want to persuade people to act in order to avoid some dire outcome. Should you try to frighten your audience about just how terrible the outcome would be, or should you avoid such fear tactics? Let’s return to our hypothetical campaign to reduce carbon emissions. Should you scare the daylights out of people with images of wildfires and flooded coastal areas, or should you expose your audience to tamer fare? The ELM offers somewhat competing notions regarding fear and persuasion. On the one hand, intense fear could disrupt the careful, thoughtful processing of the message, thus reducing the chances of long-lasting attitude change. On the other hand, the right kind of fear might heighten people’s motivation to attend to the message, thus increasing the likelihood of enduring attitude change (Calanchini, Moons, & Mackie, 2016).



Inducing fear about something by showing vivid images reduced smoking substantially more than simply providing instructions about quitting did.

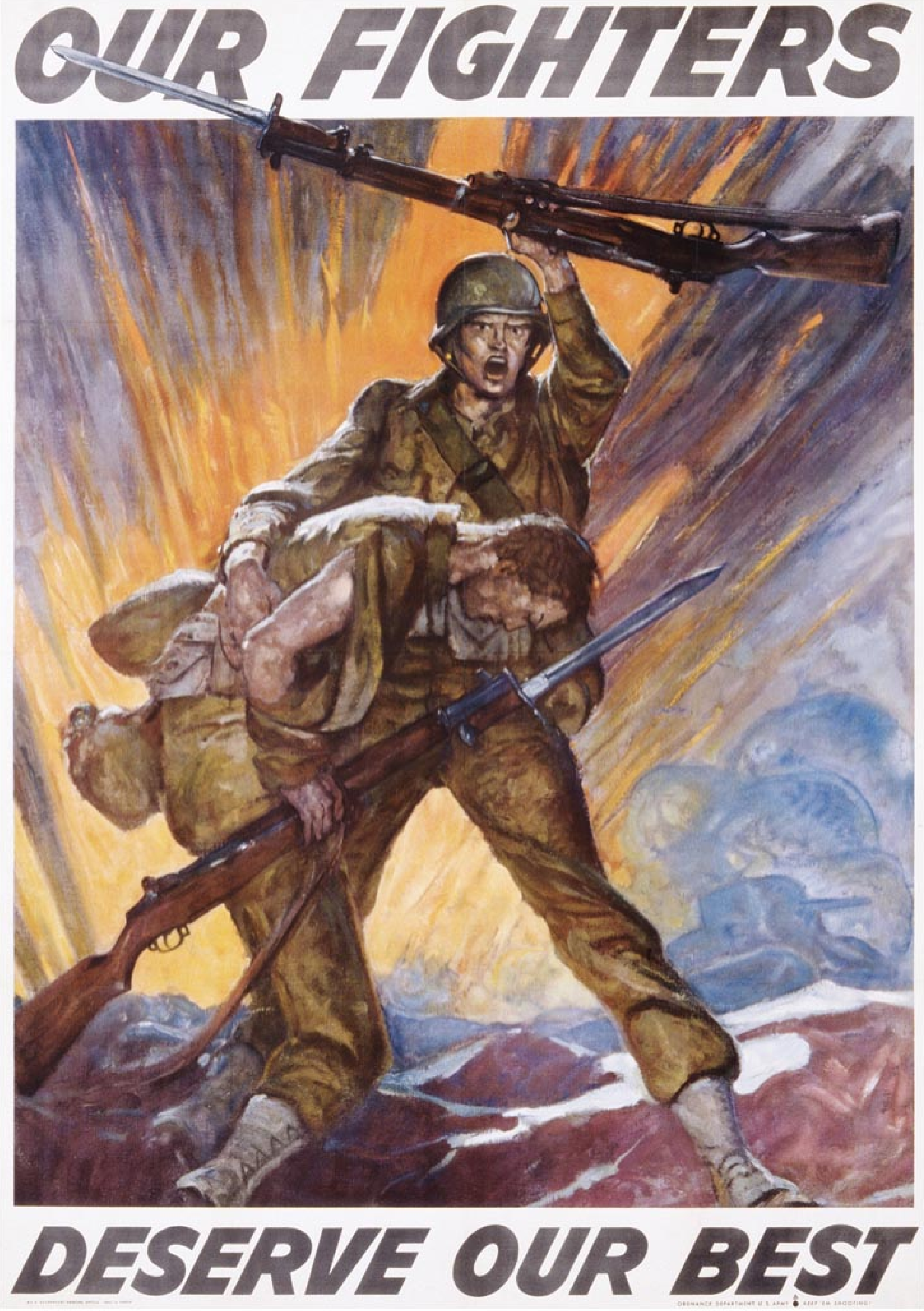
Fear plus instructions was the most effective treatment.

FIGURE 7.3 **FEAR AND PERSUASIVE MESSAGES** Fear, especially when paired with instructions on how to respond to the fear, is likely to lead to attitude change. Source: Adapted from Leventhal et al., 1967.

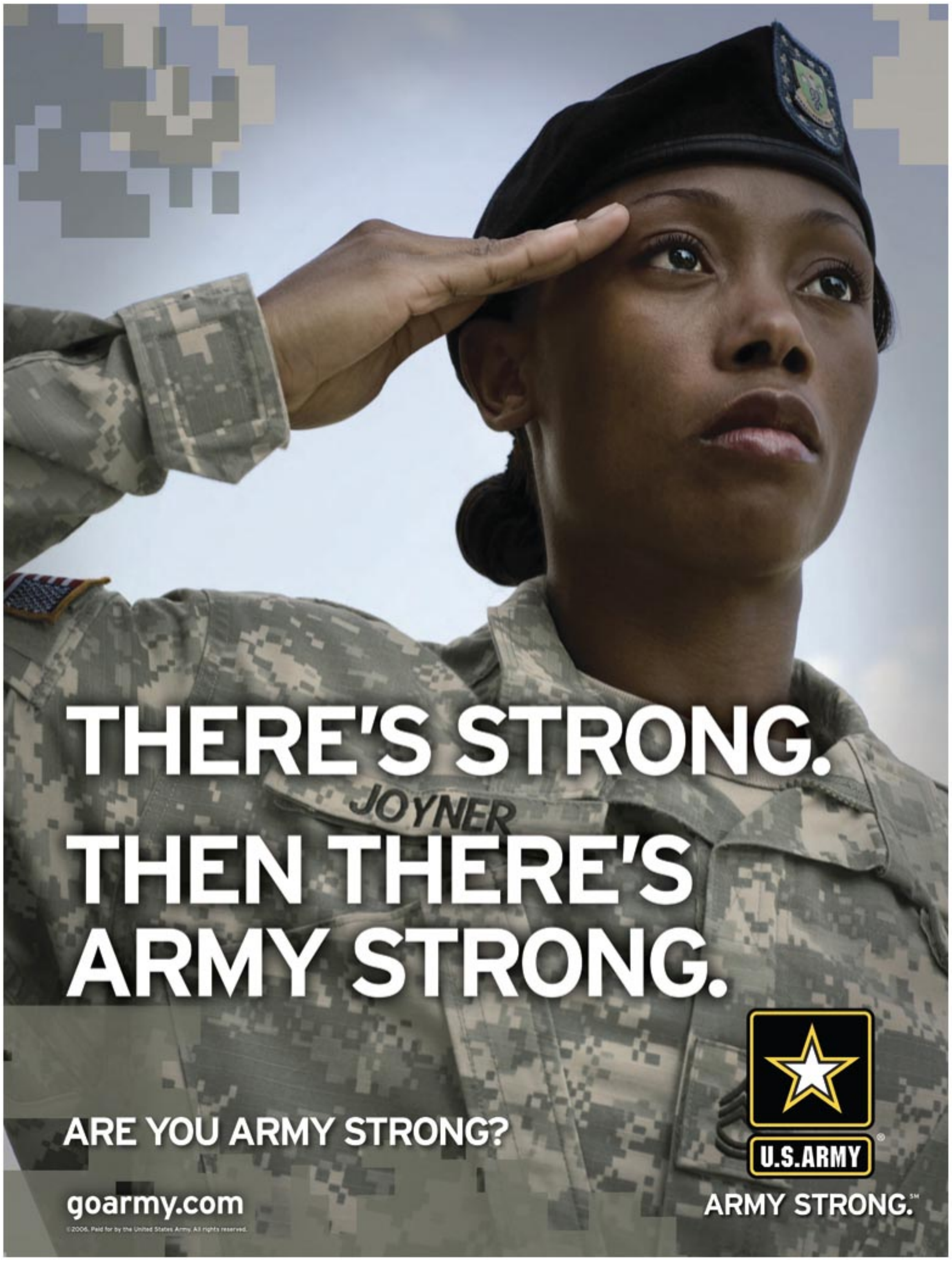
In general, the evidence indicates that it’s advisable to make ad campaigns frightening (Dillard & Li, 2020; Tannenbaum et al., 2015), but the key is to include clear, concrete information about steps people can take to address the source of the fear (Boster & Mongeau, 1984). Supporting this recommendation, Howard Leventhal and his colleagues tried to change smoking habits in three ways. They showed some participants a graphic film of the effects of lung cancer, which included footage of a lung operation in which surgeons removed the blackened lung of a smoker. They gave other participants a pamphlet with instructions about how to quit smoking. A third group both saw the film and read the pamphlet (Leventhal, Watts, & Pagano, 1967). Participants who only viewed the scary film reduced their smoking more than those who just read the bland instructions did. In this case, fear was persuasive. But participants exposed to both the film and the pamphlet decreased their smoking the most. **Figure 7.3** presents participants' self-reports of their daily smoking behavior a month after the intervention. In short, when fear-eliciting persuasive messages also provide information that can be acted on, they can be highly effective (Leventhal, 1970; Leventhal et al., 1967; Robberson & Rogers, 1988).

CULTURE As you would expect, it's important to tailor a message to fit the norms, values, and outlook of the cultural groups that make up your audience. Thus, message content often differs substantially in the media of independent and interdependent cultures. Marketing experts Sang-pil Han and Sharon Shavitt analyzed advertisements in American and Korean news magazines and women's magazines (Han & Shavitt, 1994). They found that the American ads emphasized benefits to the individual ("Make your way through the crowd"), whereas Korean ads focused on benefits to collectives ("We have a way of bringing people closer together"). In experimental studies that manipulated the content of advertisements, these researchers found that the individual-oriented ads were more effective with American participants and that the collective-oriented ads were more effective with Korean participants. Similar research shows that a person's social class affects how effective particular kinds of advertisements may be. Individuals of higher socioeconomic status tend to define themselves in relatively independent terms, whereas individuals of lower socioeconomic status define themselves in more interdependent terms (Carey & Markus, 2016). Persuasive messages that appeal to independence may be more effective among individuals from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, whereas messages conveying interdependent themes may be more effective among individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

> “The death of a single Russian soldier is a tragedy. The death of a million soldiers is a statistic.”
>
> —JOSEPH STALIN


OUR FIGHTERS
DESERVE OUR BEST
ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT U.S. ARMY
KEEP 'EM SHOOTING!

(A)


JOYNER
THERE'S STRONG.
THEN THERE'S
ARMY STRONG.
ARE YOU ARMY STRONG?
goarmy.com
©2006. Paid for by the United States Army. All rights reserved.
U.S.ARMY
ARMY STRONG.

(B)

MESSAGE CHARACTERISTICS AND TARGETING Messages may vary at different times within the same society or culture. (A) During World War II, U.S. Army posters stressed collective concerns. (B) In recent times, they have highlighted individual characteristics.

Along related lines, recall the discussion in Chapter 3 about cultural differences in motivational orientation. Whereas Westerners tend to pursue their goals with a promotion orientation, focusing on the positive outcomes they hope to achieve, East Asians are more inclined to pursue their goals with a prevention orientation, focusing on the negative outcomes they hope to avoid (A. Y. Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000). What do such differences suggest about how best to frame persuasive appeals aimed at Westerners versus East Asians? In one study, researchers recruited British university students who identified as White British or of East Asian origin (for example, Chinese, Korean) and presented them with a persuasive appeal about the importance of flossing one’s teeth (Uskul, Sherman, & Fitzgibbon, 2009). The appeal was framed in terms of either the benefit of flossing or the cost of not flossing. The White British participants were more persuaded by the gain-framed message, whereas the East Asian participants were more swayed by the loss-framed message.

Audience Characteristics

The work on culture and persuasion illustrates a broader idea: It’s important to match the characteristics of the persuasive message to characteristics of the intended audience. In fact, researchers have discovered a range of audience characteristics that can influence whether a persuasive message is likely to be effective.

NEED FOR COGNITION People differ in their need for cognition—that is, the degree to which they like to think deeply about things (Cacioppo et al., 1996). Those with a strong need for cognition like to think, puzzle, ponder, and consider multiple perspectives on issues. You might observe these people on the subway reading *Scientific American* or working through sudoku puzzles on their smartphone. People with a weaker need for cognition don’t find thought and contemplation that much fun.

As you might imagine, people with a high need for cognition are more persuaded by high-quality arguments and are relatively unmoved by peripheral cues of persuasion (Cacioppo, Petty, & Morris, 1983; Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992; Luttrell, Petty, & Xu, 2017). By contrast, people who have a lower need for cognition are persuaded more by easier-to-process, peripheral cues.

MOOD As anyone who’s ever tried to win the heart of another can attest, it’s easier to persuade when the person you’re trying to woo is in the right mood. It’s no wonder that sometimes people go to great lengths to create a particular mood in an audience they’re trying to sway. Adolf Hitler staged enormous rallies for his most important speeches, surrounded by bold Nazi banners, awesome displays of military strength, soaring music, and thousands of supporters chanting and saluting in unison. His intent was to stir the emotions of his audience to make them more receptive to his ideas. Studies have found that people exposed to persuasive messages while eating delicious food or listening to beautiful music are more apt to change their attitudes (McGuire, 1985).

BOX 7.2

FOCUS ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Using Social Psychology to Overcome Barriers to Climate Inaction

For more than half a century, scientists have been sounding the alarm about changes in the Earth’s climate caused by human activity and their devastating consequences. With record-setting temperatures, wildfires, hurricanes, and the like becoming more common each year, public awareness and discourse about the climate crisis have intensified. Yet progress on mitigating climate change remains slow. In the United States, Congress has failed to enact any meaningful climate legislation. Multiple reasons for this have been proposed, and many people have pointed to Republican skepticism about climate change as a key barrier. But another possibility is sheer political polarization—that is, disagreement between Republicans and Democrats not just about climate policy, but about any policy that the other party supports. In effect, what one’s party endorses or opposes (or what the other party endorses or opposes) may serve as a peripheral cue that leads people to “place party over policy” (Cohen, 2003). Figuring out the reasons for legislative inaction on climate change is important because different reasons may call for different types of intervention to prompt action.

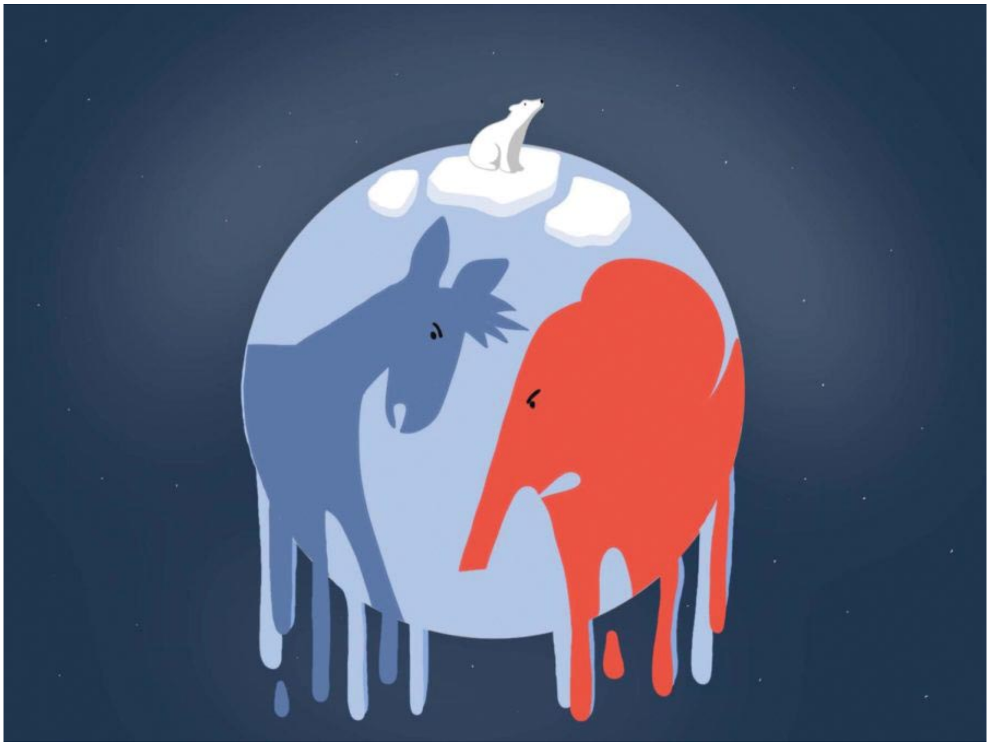
Social psychologists have insights to offer here. Van Boven and colleagues (Ehret, Van Boven, & Sherman, 2018; Van Boven, Ehret, & Sherman, 2018) examined the role of both Republican climate skepticism and “party over policy” tendencies in impeding the enactment of climate policy. To do so, the researchers first surveyed two large and diverse samples of respondents in 2014 and 2016 about their climate change beliefs. Although a higher percentage of Democrats than Republicans fell into the category of climate change believers (and a higher percentage of Democrats indicated a very strong belief in climate change), a majority of Republicans agreed that climate change exists. (Democrats professed 93 percent and 89 percent belief in climate change in the 2014 and 2016 samples, respectively; Republicans professed 70 percent and 63 percent belief.) Looking at it another way, belief in the reality of climate change was above the neutral midpoint of the belief rating scale for both Democrats and Republicans. These findings suggest that while there is greater Republican climate skepticism, it is not likely the whole story behind legislative inaction.

To examine the influence of “party over policy” thinking, the researchers presented the respondents in the 2014 sample with a description of one of two carbon pricing policies (a cap-and-trade policy or a revenue-neutral carbon tax policy). Each was described as “a summary of a proposed energy policy that is designed to address climate change.” Whereas cap-and-trade policies have been associated with Democratic and liberal politicians, revenue-neutral carbon tax policies have been linked to Republican and conservative thinkers. Critically, the partisan framing of the policies was manipulated so that participants were led to believe that the policy was strongly supported by either Democratic or Republican politicians and was opposed by members of the other party. After reading about the policy, respondents indicated their level of support for it.

Did respondents place party over policy? Very strongly so. Regardless of the policy itself, Democratic respondents supported the policy more when they thought Democratic politicians supported it than when they thought Republican politicians did, and the reverse was true for Republican respondents. While Democratic respondents supported both climate policies more than Republican respondents did, the level of policy support among Democratic and Republican participants was influenced to a similar degree by which party they thought supported the policy, not by the actual policy itself.

The researchers also asked the 2014 sample to estimate how much they thought the average Democrat and the average Republican would support the policy they had read, and the researchers then compared these estimates with actual levels of support among members of each party. Participants slightly exaggerated how much their fellow party members would be swayed by whether the policy was supported by their own party or not, and they substantially overestimated the degree to which members of the other party would place party over policy. Thus, not only do people appear to be polarized in terms of their own support for climate policy, but they also expect fellow party members to be more polarized than is the case and expect members of the opposite party to be even more polarized. What’s more, the extent to which participants exaggerated the “party over policy” leanings of their fellow party members significantly influenced their own level of policy support. In other words, believing in a strong norm of partisanship when it comes to climate policies affects people’s own stance toward such policies.

Social psychology findings like these shine a light on partisanship as a major barrier to climate legislation. But they also suggest some possible interventions. For one, it would be useful to find ways to correct people’s exaggerated estimates of partisan opposition to climate policy so that perceived norms of partisanship, and their impact, are weakened. A related approach would be to find ways to decouple partisan identity from climate beliefs. For example, the term “climate change” has fewer partisan associations than the term “global warming” does, and thus its use likely makes partisan identity less salient (Kahan, 2012). Severing the link between party affiliation and climate change would free people from pressures they may feel to hold certain beliefs and to behave in line with their party identity.



PARTISANSHIP AND CLIMATE CHANGE The tendency for Democrats and Republicans to put "party over policy" is a likely reason behind the lack of substantive legislative action on the climate crisis in the United States.

The effects of mood on persuasion can also be more nuanced. Duane Wegener and Richard Petty suggest that persuasive efforts tend to be successful when the mood of the message matches the mood of the audience. More pessimistic, counterattitudinal messages (arguing against the prevailing attitude of the audience) tend to prompt greater message processing in sad or depressed people, whereas uplifting, optimistic, pro-attitudinal messages prompt greater message processing in happy people (Bless et al., 1996; Wegener & Petty, 1994; Wegener, Petty, & Smith, 1995). Other work shows that inducing people to feel guilt can increase their compliance with a persuasive appeal so long as the communication offers people a way to alleviate some of this guilt. For instance, an appeal to engage in pro-environment behavior can succeed so long as the message conveys how such behavior helps repair the environment (Graton, Ric, & Gonzalez, 2016).

AGE Who is more likely to be persuaded by messages: younger people or older people? As you might have guessed, it’s younger people (Sears, 1986). This finding has great real-world significance. For example, one source of former president Reagan’s political success was the overwhelming support he received from the 18–25 age-group, the same demographic group that backed President Obama in overwhelming numbers 28 years later in the 2008 U.S. presidential election. This young age-group can be quite malleable when it comes to political allegiances.

Another real-world application of the age effect in persuasion has to do with relying on children as witnesses in legal cases. In child abuse cases, for instance, how seriously the courts should consider the testimony of young children is a major issue in light of the fact that their attitudes, even their “memories,” can be readily altered by unscrupulous attorneys more interested in winning a case than getting at the truth (Loftus, 1993, 2003). A further problem involves the extent of advertising directed at young children. Given that advertising can shape people’s attitudes and does so more for the young than for the old, the immense amount of advertising directed at children 16 and younger is a serious concern.

KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE Let’s return again to the example of changing people’s everyday habits related to carbon emissions. How might the literature on persuasion help you design a campaign? Perhaps the most important lesson is to tailor your message to your audience. Certain people—including those for whom global warming is personally relevant, who know quite a bit about the crisis, and who have a high need for cognition—are likely to go through the central route to persuasion, responding to the deeper substance of the message. For these people, there is no substitute for high-quality messages that are logical and clear, that make subtle rather than heavy-handed recommendations, and that appeal to clear consequences and values.

For many other people, and in many contexts, the peripheral route to persuasion is probably a better bet. For example, the peripheral route is likely to be more effective for younger audiences, for those who know less about global warming, and for people who don’t think global warming is relevant to their lives. For such audiences, you might resort to attractive or credible message sources or vivid messages.

LOOKING BACK

The three elements of persuasion are the characteristics of the message’s source, the content of the message itself, and the intended audience. In general, attractive, credible, and confident sources are effective at persuasion. Messages containing strong (versus weak) arguments will be more persuasive, especially through the central route of attitude change. Messages with vivid or fear-inducing content can also be quite persuasive, as can messages that are framed in culturally relevant ways. Important audience characteristics include need for cognition, mood, and age.

Glossary

source characteristics

Characteristics of the person who delivers a persuasive message, such as attractiveness, credibility, and certainty.

sleeper effect

An effect that occurs when a persuasive message from an unreliable source initially exerts little influence but later causes attitudes to shift.

message characteristics

Aspects or content of a persuasive message, including the quality of the evidence and the explicitness of its conclusions.

identifiable victim effect

The tendency to be more moved by the vivid plight of a single individual than by the struggles of a more abstract number of people.

audience characteristics

Characteristics of those who receive a persuasive message, including need for cognition, mood, and age.

The Media and Persuasion

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe how the media influence people's conceptions of what issues are important.
- Explain the hostile media phenomenon.
- Discuss how and to what extent misinformation can be spread by the media.

We live in a media-saturated world. A 2017 report indicated that U.S. adults spend an average of 12 hours, 7 minutes a day consuming media of all kinds—watching TV and videos, surfing the internet, listening to the radio, reading newspapers and magazines (eMarketer, 2017). Not surprisingly, this figure increased significantly during the pandemic: A 2020 report showed 13 hours, 21 minutes of media consumption per day for the average American—a record high (Schomer, 2021). If we assume that most U.S. adults get about 7 hours of sleep a night, this means an astounding three-fourths of the waking hours of most Americans are spent taking in various types of broadcast, online, and print media.

The Power of the Media

How powerful are the media in shaping our attitudes? Documenting the effects of the media on people's attitudes is no simple task. Researchers have done some experiments, but they've typically relied on surveys in which people report which programs and ads they've seen. The investigator then compares the opinions of those exposed to certain programs or ads with the opinions of those who had less exposure to see whether the opinions of the former group more closely align with the positions advocated in the media. Retrospective self-reports, however, are notoriously fallible. If participants say they have seen some ad, or say they have not, how can researchers be sure? How can they be sure different viewers saw the ad under the same conditions? Most important, what about self-selection effects? For example, highly motivated citizens are more likely to tune in to political ads than less motivated citizens are (Iyengar, 2004). Any apparent effect of an ad campaign is confounded by these differences in political motivation.

Regardless of these difficulties, many studies attest to the media’s power to influence people’s tastes, opinions, and behavior. Recent data suggest that the power of broadcast media doesn’t just arise from the fact that it reaches a wide audience; it also stems from the sheer awareness on the part of each person that a very large number of other people are being reached by the same message (Shteynberg et al., 2016). When people believe they’re attending to a stimulus—a televised political speech, for instance—at the same time that many others are attending to it (a phenomenon known as *shared attention*), they’re inclined to process the stimulus more deeply, resulting in persuasion via the ELM’s central route.

Not surprisingly, researchers are increasingly paying attention to the role of social media in persuasion. Consider the use of social media platforms like Facebook. Although many people use Facebook for social and entertainment purposes, the platform provides a forum for people to express their opinions on political candidates, parenting practices, vaccines, current events, restaurants, and so on. Facebook and other social media platforms also serve as sources of news for many people, a fact that first became salient when evidence emerged that the Russian government used social media to meddle in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Of course, the role of Facebook and other social media during and after the divisive 2020 U.S. presidential election is a topic that remains in the headlines today. Did Facebook do enough to counter the spread of misinformation during the election? Can Facebook be blamed for allowing the growth of extremist groups or for enabling the January 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol? Regardless of the various ways that people use social media, platforms like Facebook expose us to others' opinions, and growing evidence suggests that such exposure can sway our opinions and behavior (Baek, 2015; Diehl, Weeks, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2016; Greenwood, Sorenson, & Warner, 2016).

The Media and Conceptions of Social Reality

Some researchers have pointed to a more indirect—but arguably more profound and unsettling—influence of the media in shaping our very conception of social reality (Eibach, Libby, & Gilovich, 2003). For example, even if specific advertisements don't succeed at getting us to buy specific products, they may still sway us to believe that personal happiness lies in materialistic pursuits. Television and film portrayals of U.S. society can mislead us about, for example, actual levels of racial or socioeconomic diversity in a given region or country. And regardless of whether political ads persuade us to vote for a particular candidate, they may convince us that the country is going downhill.

Political scientist Shanto Iyengar and social psychologist Donald Kinder refer to this effect of the media as agenda control: Media of all types substantially contribute to shaping the kinds of information we think are important. For example, the prominence given to certain issues in the news media—crime, traffic congestion, or economic downturns—is correlated with the public's perception that these issues are important (Cialdini, 2016; Dearing & Rogers, 1996; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Iyengar & Simon, 2000). In an experiment showing that issue prominence influences people’s beliefs about issue importance, experimenters had participants view what they believed to be evening news shows. Viewers in one condition saw three news stories dealing with U.S. dependence on foreign energy sources, while viewers in another condition saw six such stories and viewers in a final condition saw no stories like this (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Of those viewers who were exposed to no news about dependence on foreign energy, 24 percent cited energy as one of the three most important problems facing the country. This proportion rose to 50 percent among the participants who saw three stories on the subject and 65 percent among those who saw six stories. Therefore, a politician in office should hope that news reports focus on things that are going well at the time, and a politician who wishes to defeat an incumbent should hope that the media focus on things that are going poorly.

AGENDA CONTROL IN FILMS Sofia Coppola’s film *The Beguiled* featured a cast lacking in racial diversity. Coppola was criticized for not including the African American character who appeared in the book on which the film was based. Such biased media portrayals can result in misleading portraits of the world.

George Gerbner and his colleagues have explored the agenda control thesis by coding the content of television programs and looking at the attitudes of heavy TV viewers (Gerbner et al., 1986). It should come as no surprise that the world depicted on most TV shows scarcely resembles social reality. On prime-time programs, for example, men outnumber women by a factor of 3 to 1, and analyses of popular films from 2007 to 2012 have found that only about 25 percent of speaking roles go to women (S. L. Smith et al., 2013). People of color, young children, and older adults are also underrepresented. Crime is wildly more prevalent per unit of time on prime-time shows than in the average American’s real life. And heavy TV viewers—those who watch 5 hours or more per day—construe social reality much like the reality they see on the screen. They tend to endorse more racially prejudiced attitudes, assume that women have more limited abilities than men, and overestimate the prevalence of violent crime. These findings could, of course, be the result of self-selection: Perhaps more prejudiced, cynical, and uninformed people watch more TV in the first place. But the results are still worth pondering.

Perceptions of Bias in the Media

Accusations of media bias have been commonplace throughout history. Conservatives regularly deride the “lamestream media” for having what they see as a consistent “liberal bias.” Liberals regularly complain that Fox News is biased across the board in its political coverage. The thesis that the media are ideologically biased regularly inspires the publication of best-selling books that appeal to one side or the other's beliefs about bias. An entire organization, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR; www.fair.org), is devoted to documenting bias in the media (showing, for instance, that conservatives are more likely to appear as experts on such news shows as *Nightline*).

Research by Robert Vallone, Lee Ross, and Mark Lepper (1985) suggests that we all tend to believe the media are biased against our preferred causes, a tendency they refer to as the hostile media phenomenon. According to these researchers, most people believe they see the world in a reasonable, objective fashion—a fallacy known as naive realism (see Chapter 1). Thus, any media presentation that attempts to present both sides of an issue is going to be seen as biased by both sides of the controversy. This basic tendency to perceive the media as hostile is a regular feature of presidential politics. In one telephone survey conducted 3 days before the 1980 U.S. presidential election, 83 percent of Jimmy Carter supporters who thought media coverage had favored one candidate believed it had favored Reagan. In contrast, among Reagan supporters who felt the media had been biased, 96 percent said the media had favored Carter. One thing we can all agree on: The media are biased!

Misinformation and the Media

Bias in the media—for instance, giving more favorable coverage to certain stories than to others—is one thing; presenting information that is factually dubious or outright inaccurate is another. The past decade or so has seen the proliferation of misinformation or "fake news," fueled by the incredible speed with which information can be spread in today's world (Lazer et al., 2018). Indeed, research suggests that false news spreads more quickly than truthful news does, perhaps due to the greater novelty of false news and the greater emotional reactions that it often elicits (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). This is alarming for a number of reasons. Misinformation can influence people to make misguided decisions about significant issues, including which political candidates or parties to support, how best to take care of their own physical health and well-being, and whether to take action to deal with climate change. For example, misinformation that casts doubt on the reality of global warming may lead people to do nothing about climate change or even to oppose efforts to combat it. Belief in misinformation about the virus that causes COVID-19 has been linked to a lower willingness to get vaccinated against the disease (Roozenbeek et al., 2020) as well as greater support for violence against those arguing for vaccination (e.g., Jolley & Paterson, 2020). And false claims of voter fraud in the wake of the 2020 U.S. presidential election have been linked to an erosion of confidence in electoral integrity (Berlinski et al., 2021).

> “Before mass leaders seize the power to fit reality to their lies, their propaganda is marked by its extreme contempt for facts as such, for in their opinion fact depends entirely on the power of man who can fabricate it.”
>
> —HANNAH ARENDT, *THE ORIGINS OF TOTALITARIANISM*

Just how bad is the problem of fake news? This is an obviously complex question given that there are many domains in which misinformation exists and many ways in which it can be transmitted. In a recent study attempting to address this question in the political domain, researchers conducted a detailed analysis of user traffic to a set of untrustworthy websites (those that had been identified by prior research as publishing factually dubious content; Grinberg et al., 2019) during the 2016 U.S. presidential election (Guess, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2020). They found, somewhat reassuringly, that fewer than half of all Americans visited one of these websites in the weeks leading up to the election. Moreover, these websites made up only a small portion of people’s online news diets. However, the researchers also found that visitors to untrustworthy websites only rarely consulted any of the fact-checking websites that might have set them straight. Completely eliminating the spread of misinformation is an impossible goal, but research on the severity and impact of the problem will continue to be a major focus of study among social psychologists, political scientists, and the like. Also critical is research on how to spot fake news and resist its impact (see **Box 7.3**).

LOOKING BACK

Most people believe that the media are quite effective in directly influencing public opinion. But this influence may often be indirect. The largest effects of the media seem to involve influencing conceptions of reality and exerting agenda control, making people feel that certain issues are particularly important. It is common for people to perceive the media as biased and unfairly focused on information that is hostile to their causes, candidates, and beliefs. Misinformation or “fake news” can be spread by the media, potentially persuading people to make misguided decisions.

Glossary

agenda control

Efforts by the media to emphasize certain events and topics, thereby shaping which issues and events people think are important.

hostile media phenomenon

The tendency for people to see media coverage as biased against their own side and in favor of their opponents' side.

Resistance to Persuasion

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe the role of selective attention and selective exposure in resistance to persuasion.
- Identify some factors that can lead people to be resistant to persuasive messages.
- Describe how people can be “inoculated” against persuasive attempts.

Despite the degree to which we’re immersed in different kinds of media on a daily basis, several scientific reviews suggest that the media have only a small effect on what we buy, whom we vote for, and whether we adopt healthier habits (McGuire, 1985). Why? Part of the answer lies in the fact that many important principles of social psychology—such as the influence of our perceptual biases, previous commitments, and prior knowledge—serve as sources of independent thought and significant forces of resistance in the face of persuasive attempts.

BOX 7.3

FOCUS ON THE MEDIA

Fake News

Every day the internet spews out a great deal of fake news. Fortunately, most of the major social media outlets have fact checkers who try to delete or flag as dubious material that is false, patently harmful, or highly suspect. But that leaves a lot of potentially fake news for us to navigate for ourselves.

Some fake news is innocuous, on the order of “Man Bites Dog.” But much fake news puts society at risk. Conservative commentators often cast liberal politicians as villainous, for example, and these characterizations have contributed to increasing partisanship that is a genuine threat to democracy.

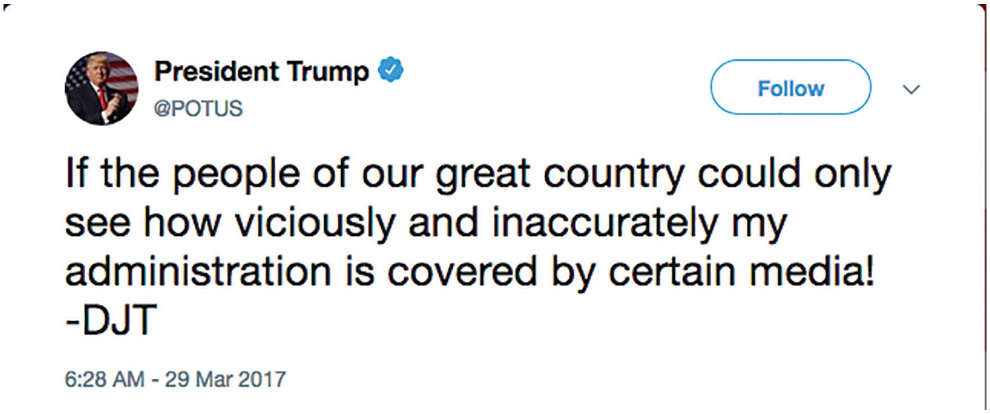
Many cues can tip us off to false statements in the media. A statement is more likely to be false the more it contains cues like these:

- The item seems designed to produce anger.
- The item describes an alleged conspiracy.
- The item contains misspellings or words with every letter capitalized (e.g., “Urban elites NEVER . . .”).
- The item contains entreaties such as “This is NOT a hoax.”
- There are links in the item to sources that do not really support the item’s content or actually contradict it.
- The item doesn’t jibe with common sense (e.g., “Hillary Clinton is running a child sex ring out of the basement of a pizza joint in Washington, D.C.” This is fake news believed by millions.).

  You can do some active sleuthing to avoid being taken in.

- Ask yourself whether the source has something to lose by being caught purveying false information. All legitimate major media face such a risk, including Fox News and CNN, each of which is often accused of pushing false stories. But if a news outlet reports something that can be proved false, it could cause them to lose readership and advertising—not to mention get them sued. These risks are much lower for social media companies and websites run by individuals.

- Check with mainstream media to see if any of them are reporting the alleged fact.
- Even if the news item looks legitimate and the logos on the website look real, the outlet may still be purveying false information. And look closely; abcnews.com is a real news outlet, but abcnews.com.co is not.
- Consult a fact-checking source such as Snopes or Lead Stories. Just enter the headline or a brief phrase in the search feature on these sites.



President Trump
@POTUS

If the people of our great country could only see how viciously and inaccurately my administration is covered by certain media! -DJT

6:28 AM - 29 Mar 2017

PERCEIVED BIAS IN THE MEDIA The hostile media phenomenon is arguably stronger than ever in today's political and media climate. Accusations of mainstream media bias seem to accompany reports of any controversial event or issue. During his presidency, Donald Trump regularly tweeted about claims of bias against him.

However, the answers to your search will not necessarily tell you whether a given item is *misleading* as opposed to outright false. Consider these examples of how news can be misleading even if not fake.

- For decades, Fox News anchors were required to give air time to someone opposing the view that human activity contributes to climate change if they presented a climate expert espousing that view. A reasonable viewer might therefore believe that experts were divided. In fact, the overwhelming majority of experts believed that human activity was contributing to climate change.
- Liberal media reported copiously on the Steele report, which maintained that Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign collaborated with the Russians. The media did not say that the report was known to be true, and in fact it turned out to be a hoax. Frequent mention of the report, however, led many to believe the report was accurate.

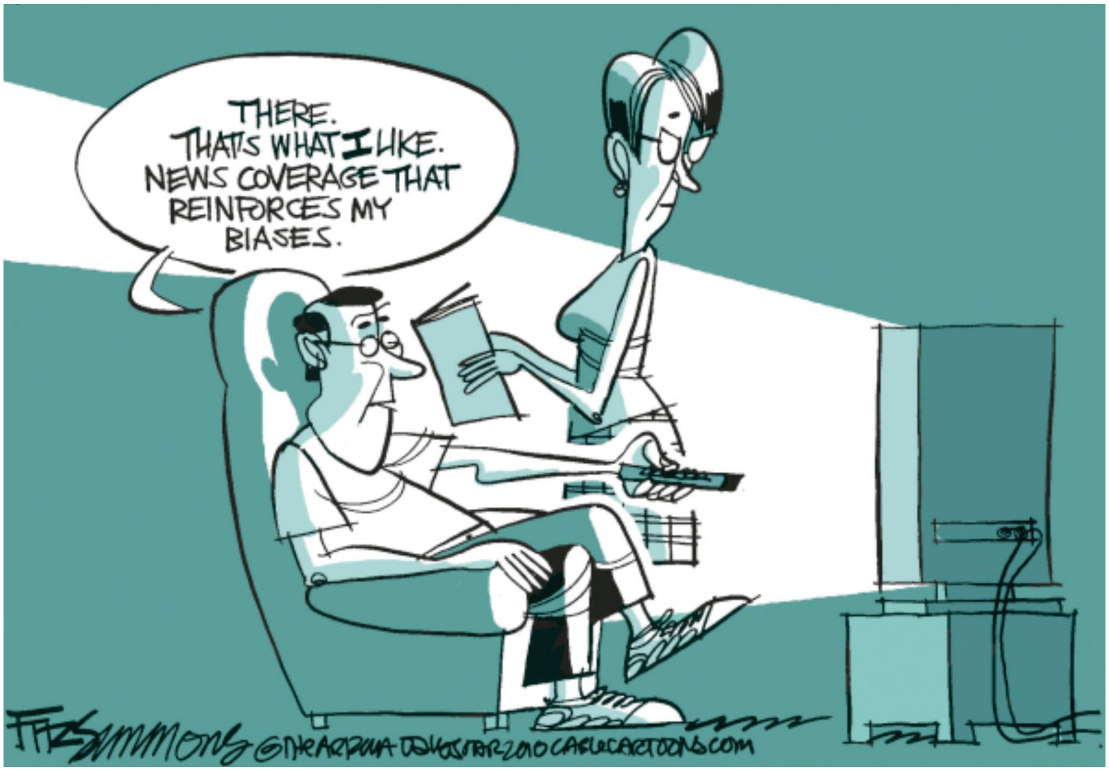
Ironically, someone crying "fake news" can be a sign that what *that* person has to say should be viewed skeptically. For example, although former president Trump set a new standard for falsehoods (literally thousands of his statements were deemed by experts to be false or misleading), when anyone presented evidence that his statements were false, he tended to respond by claiming that the evidence was "fake news." Toward the end of his first year in office, after months of demands by the media to produce evidence that any of his claims of fake news were accurate, the White House could come up with only 11 news items that inaccurately reported something about Trump's actions. Nine of those were misstatements that were corrected very soon after they were presented.

Attentional Biases and Resistance

In 1964, the U.S. Office of the Surgeon General issued a report linking smoking to lung cancer. This presumably incontrovertible evidence about the health risks of smoking would logically have both smokers and nonsmokers shifting their attitudes about the habit. Yet following the release of the report, 40 percent of smokers—compared with 10 percent of nonsmokers—found the document to be flawed. We all like to think we absorb data and information in a relatively unbiased fashion (Pronin, Gilovich, & Ross, 2004). If we learn that a particular practice or habit is dangerous to our health, we should alter our attitude accordingly. But our minds sometimes respond selectively to information in a way that maintains our initial stance. Such responses can be broken down into three related concepts: selective attention, selective evaluation, and selective framing.

Several studies indicate that people are inclined to *attend selectively* to information that confirms their original attitudes (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998; W. Hart et al., 2009; Sweeney & Gruber, 1984). We tune in to information that reinforces our attitudes, and we tune out information that contradicts them. In one study, students who either supported or opposed the legalization of marijuana listened to a message that advocated legalization (Kleinhesselink & Edwards, 1975). The message contained 14 arguments: 7 were strong and difficult to refute (and thus clearly appealing to the pro-legalization students), and 7 were silly and easy to refute (and thus very attractive to the anti-legalization students). The students heard the message through earphones accompanied by a continual static buzz. To combat this problem, students could press a button to eliminate the buzz for 5 seconds.

As you might have anticipated, the pro-legalization students pushed the button more often when the speaker was delivering the strong arguments in favor of legalization. They wanted to hear the information that would reinforce their own viewpoint. The anti-legalization students, in contrast, were more likely to push the button while the speaker was offering up the easy-to-refute arguments in favor of legalization. They wanted to focus on the weakness of the pro-legalization arguments, thereby reinforcing their anti-legalization position.


THERE.
THAT'S WHAT I LIKE.
NEWS COVERAGE THAT
REINFORCES MY
BIASES.
FITZSIMMONS ©THE ARIZONA DAILY STAR 2010 CAGLECARTOONS.COM

During presidential elections, people are more inclined to subscribe to and read newspapers, blogs, and websites that support their preferred candidate and to avoid those that support the opposition. Such selective attention in turn forms the basis of algorithms that drive people’s internet search results as well as the content of their social media feeds, leading to the creation of “echo chambers” (Quattrociocchi, Scala, & Sunstein, 2016; Stroud, 2010). It’s this phenomenon that made Donald Trump’s 2016 presidential victory a shock to many liberals, whose social media feeds in the days leading up to the election suggested that Hillary Clinton, Trump’s opponent, would likely triumph.

More recent studies continue to indicate that people engage in some level of selective attention online, but they also suggest that the problem may not be as widespread as previously thought. For instance, in an analysis of Twitter users’ ideological selectivity during the 2016 U.S. presidential election campaign, researchers found that there was more than 50 percent overlap in the ideological content that liberals and conservatives exposed themselves to (for example, via accounts they followed and tweets and retweets they received; Eady et al., 2019; see also Flaxman, Goel, & Rao, 2016; Guess, 2021). That said, the small proportion of people who did show significant bias in their attention to ideologically supportive news also tended to be more politically active, suggesting that they may wield disproportionate influence in society (Guess, 2021).

> “When I believe in something, I’m like a dog with a bone.”
>
> —MELISSA MCCARTHY

In addition to their selective attention to information in the media, people tend to evaluate information—such as the credibility of a source or the soundness of an argument—in ways that support their existing beliefs and values (Kahan, 2012; Kahan, Jenkins-Smith, & Braman, 2011). Someone who believes that the importance of climate change is exaggerated is likely to see more flaws in an article urging action to combat global warming than is someone who believes that climate change is a defining issue of the times.

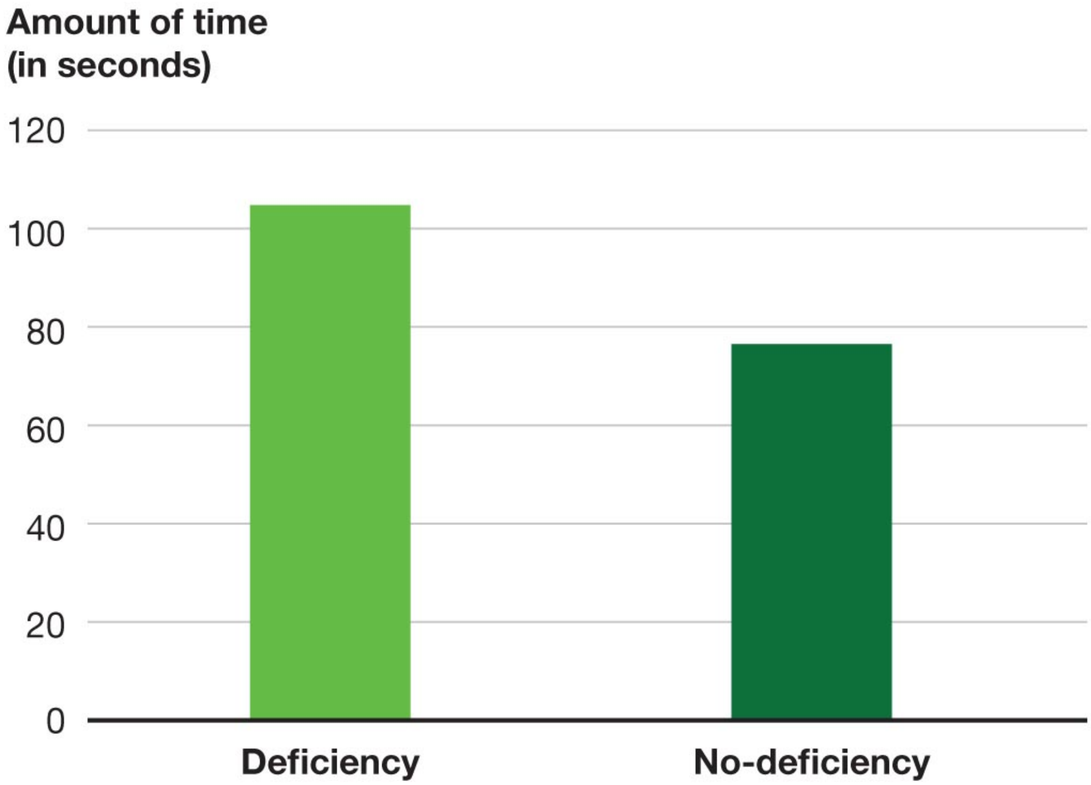


FIGURE 7.4 **SELECTIVE EVALUATION** People who are personally motivated will be more skeptical of information that challenges cherished beliefs. Source: Adapted from Ditto & Lopez, 1992.

Peter Ditto and his colleagues have shown that selective evaluation extends to evidence related to one’s personal health. Patients who receive unhealthy diagnoses are more likely to downplay both the seriousness of the diagnosis and the validity of the test that produced it (Ditto, Jemmott, & Darley, 1988). In one study, Peter Ditto and David Lopez (1992) gave undergraduates a test for a fictitious medical condition, a deficiency that was supposedly associated with pancreatic disorders later in life. The test was simple: Put saliva on a piece of yellow paper and observe whether it changes color within 20 seconds. In the deficiency condition, participants were told that if the paper remained yellow, they had the medical condition; in the no-deficiency condition, participants were told that if the paper changed to a dark green, they had the medical condition. The paper remained yellow for all participants throughout the study.

Clearly, participants in the deficiency condition would be motivated to see the paper change color, and they should be disturbed by the evidence confronting them—the paper remaining yellow. And indeed, as shown in **Figure 7.4**, these participants took almost 30 seconds longer than those who got more favorable evidence to decide that their test was finished, repeatedly dipping the paper in saliva to give it every possible opportunity to turn green.

Closely related to the tendency to selectively evaluate information in ways that bolster our existing beliefs is our propensity, described in Chapter 4, to selectively frame issues in a manner that shines a more positive light on positions we support and a more negative light on positions we oppose (Brewer & Gross, 2005; Clifford & Jerit, 2013). For example, proponents of abortion frame the issue in terms of choice (“pro-choice”), whereas opponents of abortion frame the issue in terms of life (“pro-life”). Supporters of affirmative action programs highlight the ability of such programs to right past wrongs, while opponents frame the issue in terms of reverse discrimination. Given our tendency to selectively attend to, evaluate, and frame messages and issues in ways that support our preexisting attitudes, it’s no surprise that media effects often produce little in the way of attitude change. Most messages, it would seem, end up mainly preaching to the choir.

Previous Commitments and Resistance

WAKE UP
GUNS KILL

CRIMINALS DO NOT OBEY LAWS!
WE NEED CRIMINAL CONTROL - NOT GUN CONTROL!
THE WELL ARMED WO
U.S.A.
OUTHEAST

SELECTIVE FRAMING People not only selectively evaluate evidence that supports or contradicts an attitude they hold, but opposing sides can also frame the same issue—in this case, gun control—in a selective manner. People in favor of gun control frame guns as the main reason for gun-related deaths, whereas those opposed to gun control frame the problem in terms of those who shoot the guns.

Many persuasive messages fail because they can’t overcome the target audience’s previous commitments. Antidrug campaigns are aimed at decreasing habitual drug-taking behavior, which is typically embedded in a way of life and a community of friends centered around drugs. Some forces of resistance to change may be even more formidable than habits—genetics, for example. Research reveals that our political allegiances are passed from parent to child to a degree and seem to be part of our DNA (Box 7.4). Ads that try to get people to shift their political allegiances must, in effect, convince voters to abandon these deep commitments.

There’s also evidence that public commitments—declarations of one’s attitude regarding a given issue in a public setting—make people resistant to attitude change. In some studies, when participants were induced to publicly commit to their attitudes, as people do every day when discussing politics and social issues with their friends, they were more resistant to subsequent counterattitudinal messages than control participants were (Kiesler, 1971; Pallak et al., 1972).

Public commitments increase our resistance to persuasion for the basic reason that it’s hard to back down from such endorsements without losing face, even when evidence is presented against the position we publicly embraced. A less obvious reason is that public commitments engage us in more extensive thoughts about a particular issue, which tends to produce more extreme, entrenched attitudes. Abraham Tesser labeled this idea the thought polarization hypothesis. To test his hypothesis, Tesser measured participants’ attitudes about social issues, such as legalizing prostitution (Tesser & Conlee, 1975). He then had them think for a few moments about the issue. When they stated their opinions about the same issue a second time, they routinely gave stronger ratings; both opponents and proponents stated more extreme versions of their original positions.

Knowledge and Resistance

According to the ELM, prior knowledge makes people engage with persuasive messages through the central route, thereby leading them to scrutinize those messages carefully. People with a great deal of knowledge are more resistant to persuasion; their beliefs and habits (and sometimes emotions) are tied up with their attitudes, and thus their point of view tends to be fixed. This insight has been repeatedly borne out in the experimental literature (Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992; Krosnick, 1988; Lydon, Zanna, & Ross, 1988; Zuwerink & Devine, 1996).

In a study of attitudes about environmental preservation, for example, Wendy Wood (1982) divided students into two groups: those who were pro-preservation and knew a lot about the issue and those who were pro-preservation but knew less about the subject. She exposed these two groups to a message opposed to environmental preservation. Those with a lot of knowledge about the environment changed their stance only a little bit; they counterargued a great deal in response to the message, relying on what they already knew and strongly believed about the issue. In contrast, the less knowledgeable students shifted their attitudes considerably toward the anti-preservation message.

BOX 7.4

FOCUS ON BIOLOGY

The Genetic Basis of Attitudes

One of the deepest sources of our commitment to strong attitudes and resistance to persuasive messages is our genes. Work by Abraham Tesser (1993) indicates that our opinions and beliefs are in part inherited. He examined the attitudes of monozygotic (identical) twins, who share 100 percent of their genes, and those of dizygotic (fraternal) twins, who share 50 percent of their genes. For most of the viewpoints surveyed, the identical twins’ attitudes were more similar than those of the fraternal twins. This was true, for example, of opinions about the death penalty, jazz, censorship, divorce, and socialism. Moreover, researchers found that the more heritable attitudes were also more accessible, less susceptible to persuasion, and more predictive of feelings of attraction to a stranger who had similar attitudes. Of course, there is no gene for attitudes about jazz or censorship; the hereditary transmission must occur through some element of temperament, such as impulsivity, a preference for risk taking, or a distaste for novelty (which might make a person dislike jazz but be more tolerant of censorship).

Recent research by James Fowler and his colleagues has found that genes influence not only politically relevant attitudes, as Tesser documented, but also political participation. Identical twins are more likely than fraternal twins to resemble each other in terms of party affiliation and in their likelihood of voting in an election (Fowler, Baker, & Dawes, 2008). No wonder it’s often hard to shift people’s political opinions and voting preferences and behavior; doing so would require changing a basic part of who they are.

Moralization of Attitudes

Besides knowledge-based attitudes, attitudes backed by moral conviction—that is, attitudes that are grounded in fundamental beliefs about right and wrong—can also be particularly resistant to persuasion. For example, one’s attitude about income inequality may be grounded in beliefs about social justice. Attitudes held with moral conviction essentially become “moral mandates” (Skitka, Bauman, & Mullen, 2008; Skitka et al., 2021). When attitudes morph from being merely positive or negative evaluations to being moral mandates, people are less willing to compromise on them, more motivated to act on them, more inclined to view them as universally and objectively true, and more likely to distance themselves from those who hold opposing positions (Skitka, 2010). In short, attitudes held with moral conviction are difficult to sway.

PUBLIC COMMITMENT AND RESISTANCE Publicly committing to a position on an issue can increase people’s resistance to attempts to persuade them otherwise.

However, the very fact that attitudes can be grounded in moral foundations suggests a means of using moral rhetoric to change attitudes. Focusing on liberals and conservatives, Matthew Feinberg and Robb Willer (2019) argued that one reason each group regularly fails to persuade members of the other group is that they rely on persuasive arguments grounded in moral principles they themselves care deeply about rather than tailoring messages to reflect the moral convictions of the other group, which may be different from their own. Feinberg and Willer suggest that moral reframing—framing a position in terms of moral principles that the *target* values—can be useful as a persuasion tool. For example, to persuade conservatives to support same-sex marriage, one might frame a persuasive appeal in terms of patriotism (e.g., “Gay Americans are patriotic Americans”) rather than equality (e.g., “Gay Americans should have equal rights”), given that conservatives tend to value patriotism more and equality less than liberals do. The effectiveness of moral reframing has been demonstrated across a range of domains, including ones associated with typically strongly held and divisive attitudes, such as climate change, same-sex marriage, and military spending (e.g., Feinberg & Willer, 2013, 2015; Wolsko, Ariceaga, & Seiden, 2016). Thus, while moral principles are often a source of resistance to persuasion, they can also be harnessed to increase the likelihood of swaying attitudes.

Attitude Inoculation

Thus far, we’ve looked at how people’s belief systems—their biases and preexisting knowledge—make them resistant to persuasion and attitude change. Social psychologists have discovered some techniques that can be used to strengthen these tendencies toward resistance.

William McGuire developed one such technique, which found inspiration in a rather unusual source: inoculation against viruses. When we receive an inoculation, we're exposed to a weak dose of the virus. This small exposure stimulates our immune system, which is then prepared to defend against larger doses of the virus. McGuire believed that resistance to persuasion could be encouraged in a similar fashion by attitude inoculation—small attacks on our beliefs that would engage our preexisting attitudes, prior commitments, and background knowledge and thereby counteract a larger attack (McGuire & Papageorgis, 1961).

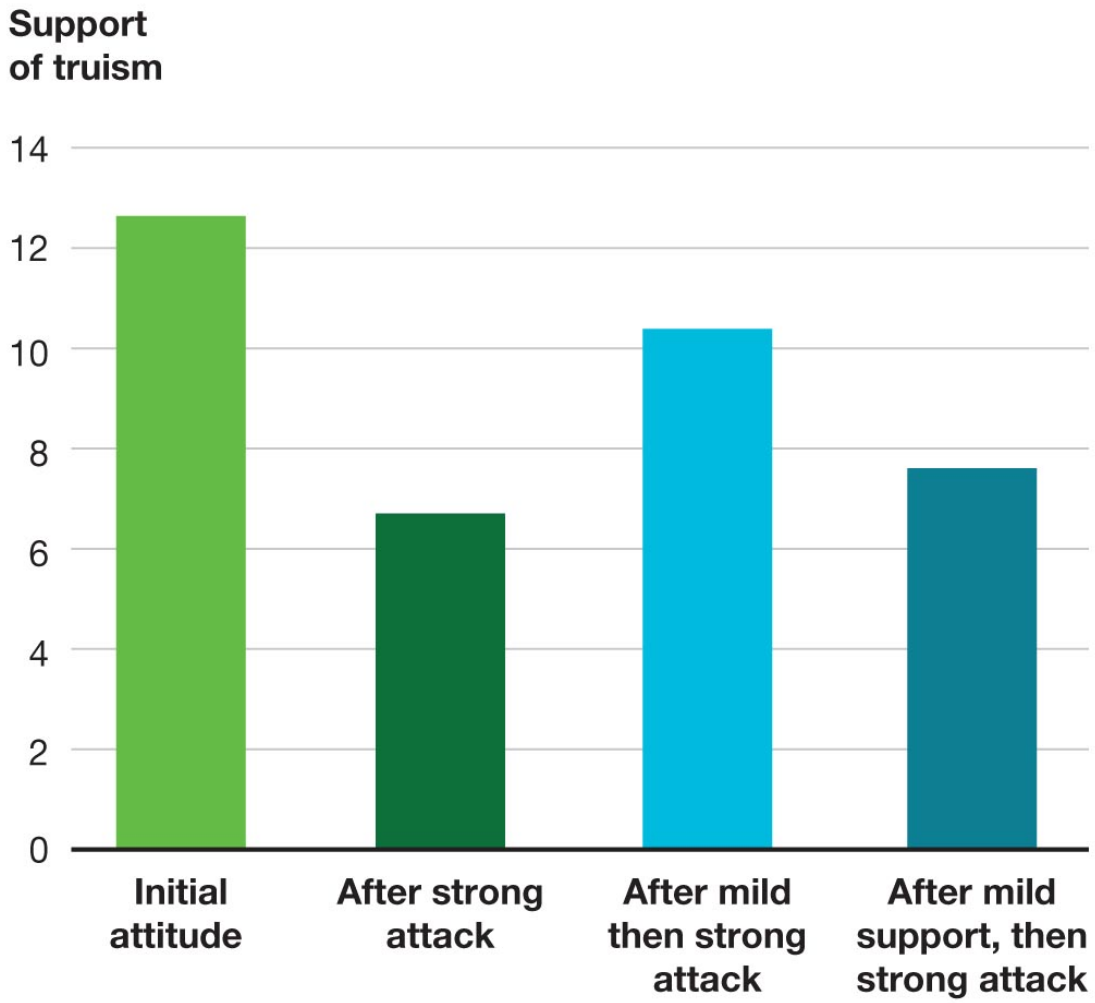


FIGURE 7.5 **ATTITUDE INOCULATION** This study showed that using preexisting attitudes, commitments, and knowledge to come up with counterarguments against an initial attack on an attitude makes people more resistant to persuasion in the face of a subsequent attack (third bar) compared with when there was no initial attack (second bar) or when they initially generated supportive arguments in favor of their attitude (fourth bar). Source: Adapted from McGuire, 1964.

In his studies on attitude inoculation, McGuire first assessed participants' preexisting attitudes by asking them to endorse different cultural truisms, such as "It's a good idea to brush your teeth after every meal if at all possible" or "The effects of penicillin have been, almost without exception, of great benefit to mankind" (McGuire, 1964). More than 75 percent of the participants checked 15 on a 15-point scale to indicate their agreement with truisms like these.

At some point from 1 hour to 7 days after the participants indicated their agreement with these truisms, they read brief essays forcefully attacking each. They then rated anew how much they believed each one, and McGuire was interested in how much impact these forceful attacks would have on their previous attitudes. As the second bar in **Figure 7.5** indicates, when the attacks were not preceded by an initial inoculation procedure, the attacks had great influence, cutting expressed belief in the truisms nearly in half.

But the attacks were much less effective when participants' attitudes were protected by an initial inoculation. In one condition, before reading the forceful attacks, participants read more mild attacks on the truisms—attacks they could easily refute (e.g., "Frequent brushing tends to damage the gums and expose vulnerable parts of the teeth to decay"). In another condition, participants read arguments mildly in favor of the truisms. Both procedures made participants' initial attitudes much more resistant to persuasion, but having to refute arguments against their initial positions was especially protective (see the third and fourth bars of Figure 7.5).

Applied to a real-life situation, such as a smoking prevention program, the idea would be to present people with pro-smoking arguments from peers and advertisements (such as “Smoking is about freedom and maturity”) and then encourage them to make counterarguments. The hope would be that counterarguing in response to an initial attack would inoculate them, thus making them more resistant to future inducements to smoke.

Inoculation techniques would seem to be very useful today given the prevalence of “fake news” and other forms of misinformation (van der Linden et al., 2017). This very idea was put to the test in a recent set of studies. In one condition, participants played a “Bad News” game that exposed them to weakened versions of techniques that the media typically use to increase the persuasiveness of misinformation, such as appealing to emotion (Maertens et al., 2021). To trigger these participants’ “immune systems,” the researchers asked them to imagine how they could refute misinformation techniques. The researchers predicted that nudging participants to come up with ways of resisting misinformation would prime their immune systems to resist being taken in by any misinformation they subsequently encountered. (Control participants played the game Tetris.) All participants were then asked to rate the reliability of news headlines that did or did not use a misinformation technique. Across three experiments, the researchers found that the participants who played the “Bad News” game—that is, who were inoculated against misinformation—rated fake news as significantly less reliable after the game than before; there was no comparable effect among control participants. Findings like these suggest that the attitude inoculation effect, developed decades before the advent of social media and fake news, can be harnessed to fight the “disease” of misinformation (Compton et al., 2021; Lewandowsky & van der Linden, 2021).

LOOKING BACK

People may resist persuasive messages by selectively attending to and evaluating information that confirms their original attitudes and beliefs and by ignoring or criticizing contradictory information. Attitudes bolstered by considerable prior knowledge or moral beliefs can be highly resistant to change. Attitude inoculation can help people resist persuasive attempts because initial small attacks give them the chance to muster arguments that can be used when faced with stronger attacks on their beliefs and attitudes.

Glossary

thought polarization hypothesis

The hypothesis that more extended thought about a particular issue tends to produce a more extreme, entrenched attitude.

attitude inoculation

Small attacks on people’s beliefs that engage their preexisting attitudes, prior commitments, and background knowledge, enabling them to counteract a subsequent larger attack and thus resist persuasion.

Chapter Review

SUMMARY

Dual-Process Approach to Persuasion

- The *elaboration likelihood model* hypothesizes that there are two routes to persuasion. A person’s motivation and ability to think carefully and systematically about the content of a persuasive message determine which route is used.
- When using the *central route* to persuasion, people attend carefully to the message, and they consider relevant evidence and underlying logic in detail. People are especially likely to go through this route when motivation is high (for example, the issue has personal consequences) and ability is high (for example, they have a lot of knowledge in the domain). With the central route, people are sensitive to the quality of the persuasive arguments, leading them to be more persuaded by strong arguments than by weak ones.
- In the *peripheral route* to persuasion, people pay attention to incidental or superficial aspects of the message. They use this route when they have little motivation (for example, the issue has no bearing on their personal outcomes) or little ability to attend to its deeper meaning (for example, they have little knowledge or are distracted). With this route, people are persuaded by easy-to-process cues, such as the attractiveness and credibility of the message source or the mere length of the persuasive message.

The Elements of Persuasion

- The elements of a persuasive attempt are the source of the message (“who”), the content of the message (“what”), and the audience of the message (“to whom”).
- Sources who are attractive, credible, and confident tend to be persuasive. Although a noncredible source is unlikely to induce immediate attitude change, a *sleeper effect* may occur in which attitude change happens gradually because the message has become increasingly dissociated from its source.
- Vivid messages are usually more persuasive than matter-of-fact ones. An example is the *identifiable victim effect*, whereby messages with a single identifiable victim are more compelling than those without such vivid imagery. Messages that instill fear in the audience can also be effective as long as they include information about the courses of action one can take to avoid the feared outcome.
- Advertisements in independent cultures tend to emphasize the individual, and those in interdependent societies tend to emphasize the collective.
- Characteristics of the audience affect whether a message is persuasive; they include the need for cognition (how often and how deeply people like to think about issues), mood, and age.

The Media and Persuasion

- Documenting the effects of media on persuasion can be methodologically challenging, but there is no question that the media can shape opinions, tastes, and behavior to some degree.
- The media can be highly effective at *agenda control*, shaping what people think about by controlling, for example, the number and kinds of news stories presented on various issues.

- The *hostile media phenomenon*, whereby people view the media as hostile to their beliefs, values, and causes, is common. People with extreme but opposite views may consider the same message to be an attempt to undermine their beliefs.
- The media sometimes deliver misinformation, commonly referred to as “fake news,” which can persuade people and lead to misguided decisions and actions. People can use certain techniques to make themselves less susceptible to inaccurate information.

Resistance to Persuasion

- People can be resistant to persuasion because of preexisting biases, commitments, and knowledge. They selectively attend to and evaluate information according to their original attitudes, tuning in to what supports these attitudes and beliefs and tuning out whatever contradicts them. People also selectively frame issues in ways that support their stances on them.
- Public commitment to a position helps people resist persuasion. Just thinking about an attitude object can produce *thought polarization*, movement toward extreme views that can be hard to change.
- People with more knowledge are more resistant to persuasion because they can counterargue messages that take a position opposite to what they know and believe.
- When attitudes are grounded in moral principles, they generally become more resistant to persuasion.
- Resistance to persuasion can be encouraged through *attitude inoculation*, exposing people to weak arguments against their position and allowing them to generate arguments to counter that opposing view.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. A new boutique coffeehouse just opened in your neighborhood featuring coffee sustainably sourced from small organic farms around the world. Design two ads for the coffeehouse, one using the central route to persuasion and one using the peripheral route. How do your ads differ?
2. Describe the three elements of a persuasive appeal and give two examples of each element that influences persuasiveness.
3. Suppose you are part of a global advertising team responsible for creating ads for oatmeal in both South Korea and the United States. Design an ad for each country and explain why you designed the ads the way you did.
4. What is the hostile media phenomenon? Describe an example of this phenomenon. How might this phenomenon be avoided or overridden?
5. Tyrell and his girlfriend, Shea, have very different views on capital punishment: He opposes it, while she supports it. Even after Tyrell presents evidence that capital punishment is both financially wasteful and ineffective at preventing crime, Shea does not change her views. Using what you know about resistance to persuasion, how might Shea be staving off Tyrell’s attempts to persuade her?

The answer guidelines for the Think About It questions can be found at the back of the book . . .

ONLINE STUDY MATERIALS

Want to earn a better grade on your test?

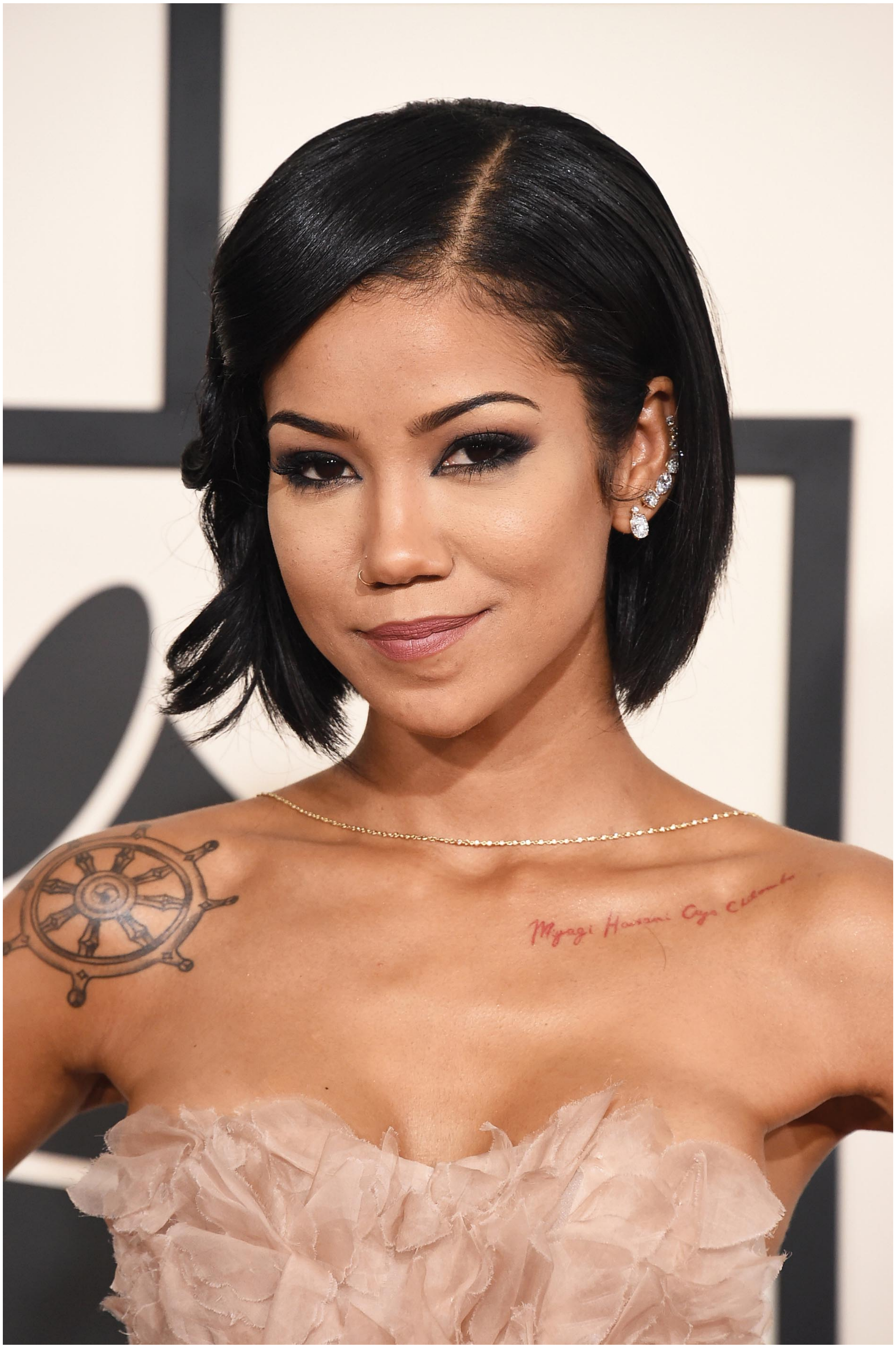
Go to **inQuizitive** to learn and review this chapter’s content, with personalized feedback along the way.

CHAPTER
8

Social Influence

Why do people in some cultures follow rules more closely than people in other cultures do?

How do norms influence how people think, feel, and act?



Why are tattoos viewed so differently today than they were in decades past?

OUTLINE

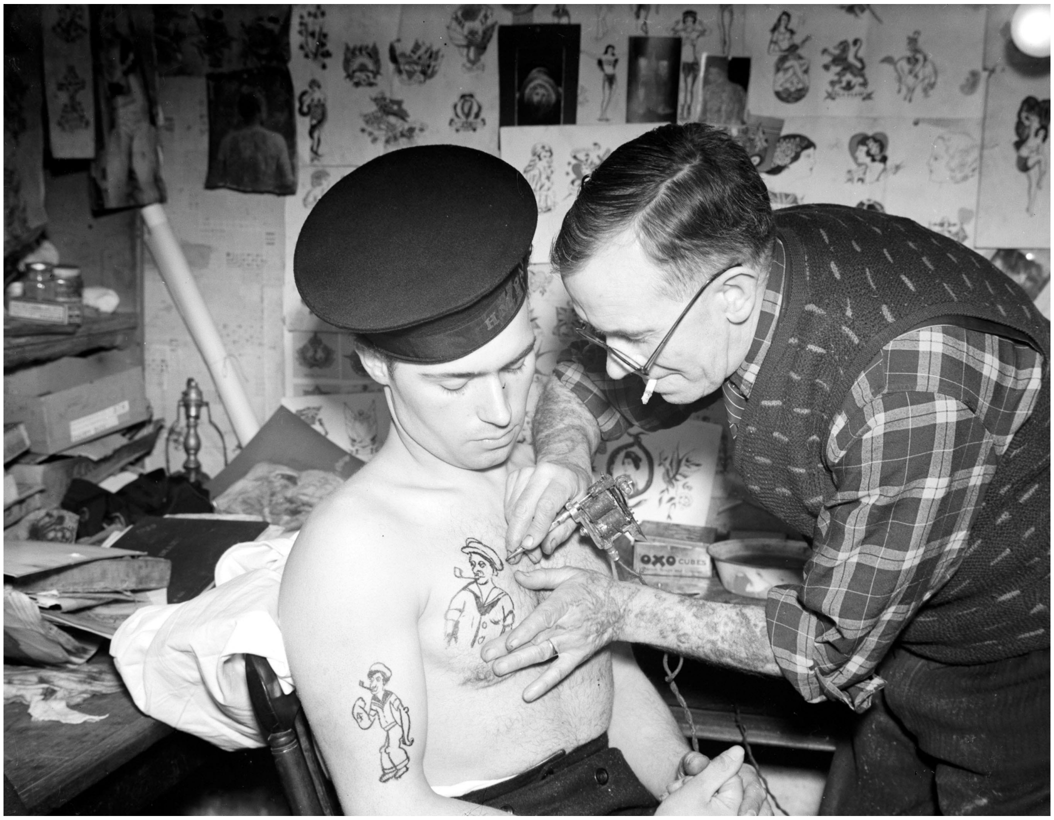
- What Is Social Influence?
- Conformity
- Compliance
- Obedience to Authority

IN 1980, TATTOOS WERE RARELY SEEN ON anyone besides sailors and prison inmates. Now you wouldn’t be surprised to see architects, accountants, doctors, judges, even professors with tattoos. According to a 2016 study, three in ten U.S. adults have at least one tattoo (Shannon-Missal, 2016).

The growing popularity of tattoos over the past few decades reflects the power of social influence. The many people who paid for permanent markings on their body didn’t suddenly sense the virtues of body art on their own; they influenced one another. The influence was sometimes implicit (“Look at that cool arrow Jill has on her ankle”) and sometimes explicit (“Check out our fraternity letters on my triceps; you should get them too”).

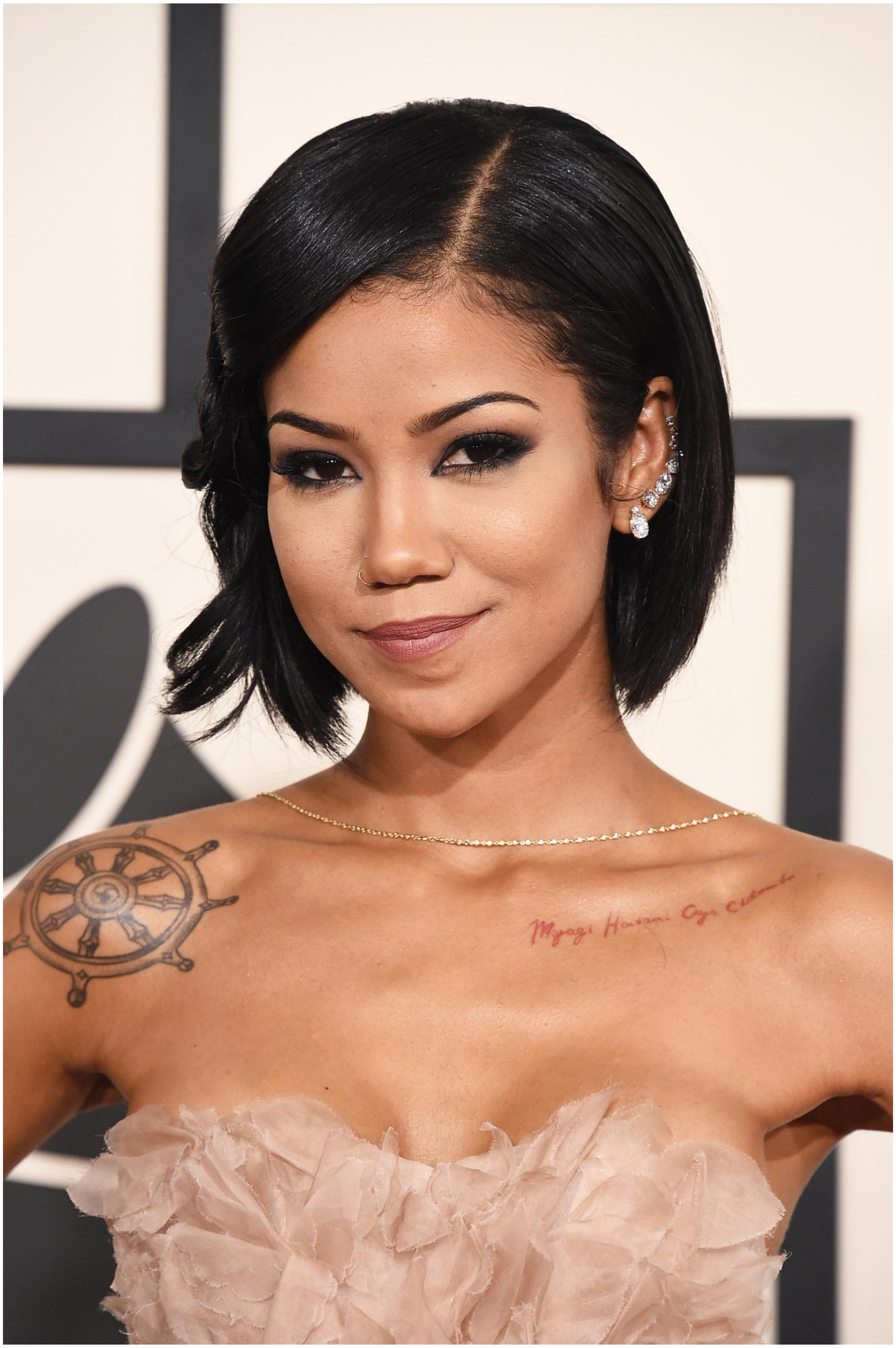
Social influence takes many forms and varies quite a bit along this implicit-explicit continuum. It contributes to prison guards abusing inmates, schoolchildren failing to stop a bully, homeowners recycling plastic waste and reducing energy use, soldiers suppressing their fear and charging into battle, and so on. Sometimes people consciously decide to copy others or to comply with requests; other times they just go along, unaware they’re being influenced. The power of social influence can be seen in studies of how much people within social networks influence each other. You are 15 percent more likely to be happy if a family member or friend is happy. You’re also 10 percent more likely to happy if a *friend* of your friend is happy and 6 percent more likely if a friend of a friend of a friend is happy. This pattern, which seems to hold through three degrees of connection in social networks, has been demonstrated in studies of drinking behavior, smoking, and obesity. If a friend of your friend is a smoker, you’re more likely to smoke too (Christakis & Fowler, 2013; Ejima, 2017).

This effect is due partly to shared genes and partly to what is called *homophily*, the tendency for people to associate disproportionately with people who are like them (see Chapter 9). However, not all these social network effects result from homophily and genetics. Some are the result of social influence. In one telling experiment, a researcher canvassed residents door-to-door and encouraged them to vote. The canvassing influenced not just the person at the door but other household members as well (Nickerson, 2008). Another study examined whether research participants playing a game with money at stake tended to cooperate with one another or focus on their narrow self-interest (Fowler & Christakis, 2010). Everyone played many rounds of the game, with each participant randomly assigned to a different four-person group each round. The investigators found that whether a person was altruistic on, say, round 3 was influenced by how selfish or altruistic that person’s groupmates had been on round 2. But participants were also influenced by what their round 2 groupmates had experienced with *their* groupmates on round 1. Because the participants were strangers randomly assigned to different groups, the results must have been due to social influence, not homophily or genetics. Thus, some types of behavior truly are contagious.



(A)

(B)


(C)

SOCIAL INFLUENCE AND FASHION Social influence affects what we do and say and how we present ourselves to others. (A) In the 1940s, tattoos were rarely seen on anyone other than sailors and soldiers. (B, C) Today, tattoos are common on both men and women.

The topic of social influence highlights an important theme first raised in Chapter 1: Many elements of the situations people find themselves in can profoundly affect their behavior. Accordingly, this chapter discusses a number of “situationist classics” in social psychology—experiments that have become well-known in both the field of psychology and the broader culture for revealing how seemingly inconsequential details of a social situation can have powerful effects on behavior. ■

What Is Social Influence?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- Distinguish different types of social influence.

Social influence refers to the many ways people affect one another. It involves changes in attitudes or behavior that result from the comments, actions, or simply the presence of others. Other people routinely try to influence us—friends pressure us to go out drinking, advertisers try to get us to adopt the latest fashion, charities ask us for money, and parents, politicians, and priests attempt to shape our moral, political, or religious values. And we often try to influence others ourselves, as when we nonconsciously smile at someone for actions we like, frown at someone for behavior we dislike, or deliberately try to coax a friend into doing us a favor. Effectively navigating social interactions requires us to figure out when to yield to others’ attempts to influence us and when—and how—to resist. It also requires that we exercise some skill in our own attempts to influence others.

Social psychologists distinguish among several types of social influence. The most familiar form of influence is conformity, defined as changing one’s beliefs or behavior to more closely align with those of others, in response to some (real or imagined) pressure to do so. As noted earlier, the pressure to conform can be implicit, as when you decide to toss out your loose-fitting jeans in favor of those with a tighter cut (or vice versa) simply because other people are doing so. But conformity pressure can also be explicit, as when members of a peer group pointedly encourage one another to vape, try new drugs, or push the envelope on the latest extreme sport. On the good side, pressure to conform can inspire people to volunteer for a community service event, reduce one’s carbon footprint, or be more accepting of members of marginalized groups.

When conformity pressure is sufficiently explicit, it blends into another type of social influence called compliance, which occurs when a person responds favorably to an explicit request from another person. Compliance attempts can come from people with some power over you, as when your boss asks you to run an errand, or they can come from peers, as when a classmate asks to borrow your notes. Compliance attempts from powerful people often aren’t as nuanced and sophisticated as those from peers because they don’t have to be. (Think how much easier it would be for your professor to persuade you to loan her $20 than it would be for the person who happens to be sitting next to you in the classroom.) Another type of social influence, obedience, occurs when a more powerful person, an authority figure, issues a demand (rather than a request) to which a less powerful person submits.

Glossary

social influence	The many ways people affect one another, including changes in attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and behavior resulting from the comments, actions, or even the mere presence of others.
conformity	Changing one’s beliefs or behavior to more closely align with those of others, in response to explicit or implicit pressure (real or imagined) to do so
compliance	Responding favorably to an explicit request from another person.

obedience

In an unequal power relationship, submitting to the demands of the person in authority.

Conformity

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Distinguish among different types of conformity and different sources of social influence.
- Describe some of the situational influences that increase or decrease the pressure to conform.
- Differentiate between how tight cultures and loose cultures, as well as independent and interdependent cultures, view pressures to conform.
- Explain how minorities can resist pressures to conform by the majority.

If you went back in time to the 1930s and visited any commuter train station, you would notice a number of similarities to today’s commuting scene as well as a few obvious differences. One important similarity is that most people would keep to the right to minimize collisions and inconvenience. But two important differences would stand out: Nearly all the commuters in the 1930s were men, and nearly all of them wore hats. The transition from a predominantly male workforce in the 1930s to today’s more gender-egalitarian workplace was the product of all sorts of social influences, many of them intentional and hard fought. But what about the hats? Was their disappearance over the years deliberate? If so, who did the deliberating? It’s hard to resist the conclusion that this trend was much more mindless—that most people simply copied the clothing choices of everyone else.

To Main St-
Flushing,
Queens
7 Flushing Local all times
7 Fl g Express we ays 3: -9:35pm
Main St-Flushi
Queens

CONFORMITY PRESSURES IN DAILY LIFE Conformity to what others are doing can be seen in these comparative images of commuters during the 1930s and commuters today. Nearly all the earlier commuters wore hats on their way to work, but very few do so now.

Is the tendency to go along with others a good thing or a bad thing? In today’ s Western society, which prizes autonomy and uniqueness, the word *conformity* can seem negative. If someone called you a conformist, for instance, you probably wouldn’ t take it as a compliment. To be sure, some types of social influence *are* bad, such as going along with a crowd to pull a harmful prank or submitting to pressure to drive a vehicle while intoxicated. Other types of conformity, however, are neither good nor bad, such as millennial women parting their hair on the side and Generation Z preferring to part in the middle.

Still other types of conformity are clearly beneficial. Conformity eliminates potential conflict, makes human interaction much smoother, and allows us not to have to think much about every possible action. Conformity plays a big part, for example, in getting people to suppress anger; to pay taxes; to form lines at the theater, museum, and grocery store; and to stay to the right side of the sidewalk or roadway (in the United States anyway). Would any of us really want to do away with those conformist tendencies? Indeed, evolutionary psychologists and anthropologists have argued that a tendency to conform is adaptive. Unless we have a good reason not to conform, we are often well served by doing what others are doing (Boyd & Richerson, 1985; Henrich & Boyd, 1998; T. J. H. Morgan, Laland, & Harris, 2015).

Automatic Mimicry

Perhaps the most subtle form of conformity is our tendency to mindlessly imitate other people’ s behavior and movements. It’ s often said that yawning and laughter are contagious, but a great deal of other behavior is contagious as well. Like it or not, we’ re all nonconscious copycats: We all mimic those around us.

The tendency to reflexively mimic the posture, mannerisms, expressions, and other actions of those around us has been examined under carefully controlled conditions. In one study, undergraduate participants were paired with another student (in reality, a confederate) for two 10-minute sessions, during which the participant and confederate took turns describing various photographs from popular magazines, such as *Newsweek* and *Time* (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). Participants worked alongside a different confederate in each of the two sessions. The confederate in one session frequently rubbed his or her face; the confederate in the other session continuously shook his or her foot. As the participant and confederate went about their business of describing the various photographs, the participant was surreptitiously filmed. The films captured the participants only—the confederates weren’t visible—so the experimenters watching and scoring the videos later on could not have been affected by any knowledge of what movement—face rubbing or foot shaking—the confederates were making. As predicted, the participants tended to mimic (conform to) the behavior exhibited by the confederate. The participants shook their feet more often in the presence of a foot-shaking confederate and rubbed their faces more often when next to a face-rubbing confederate (**Figure 8.1**).

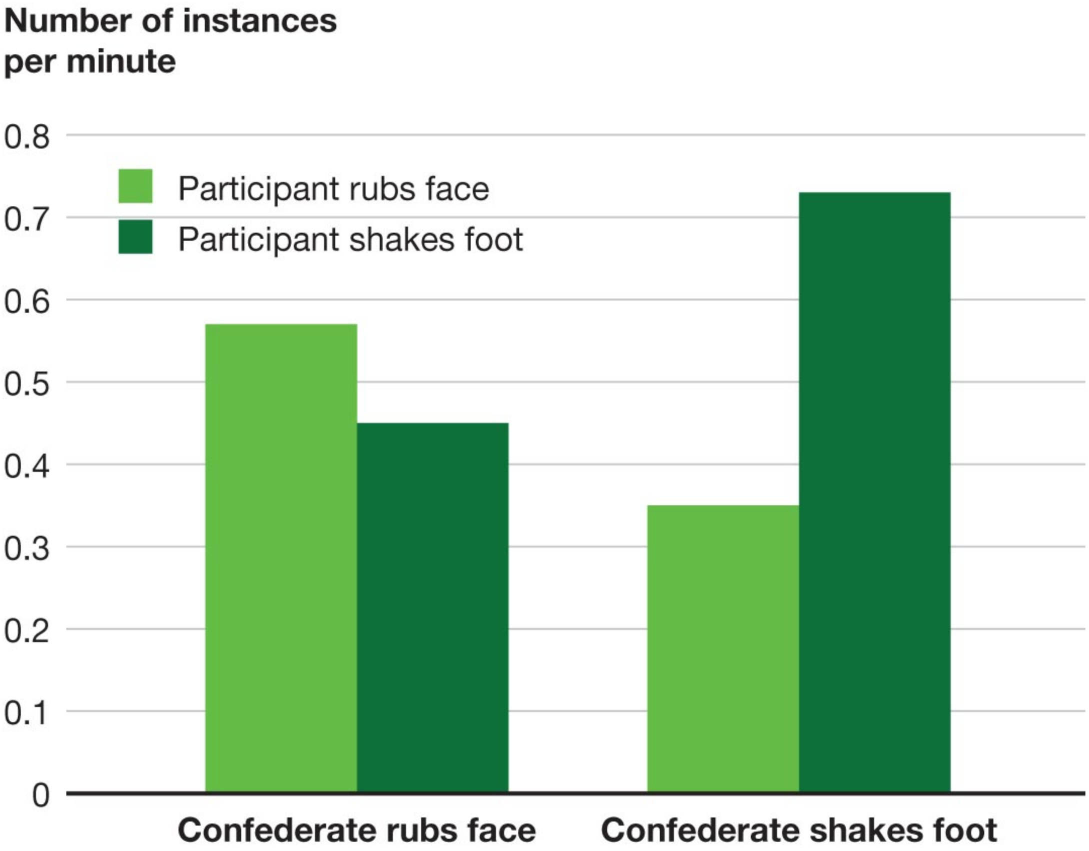


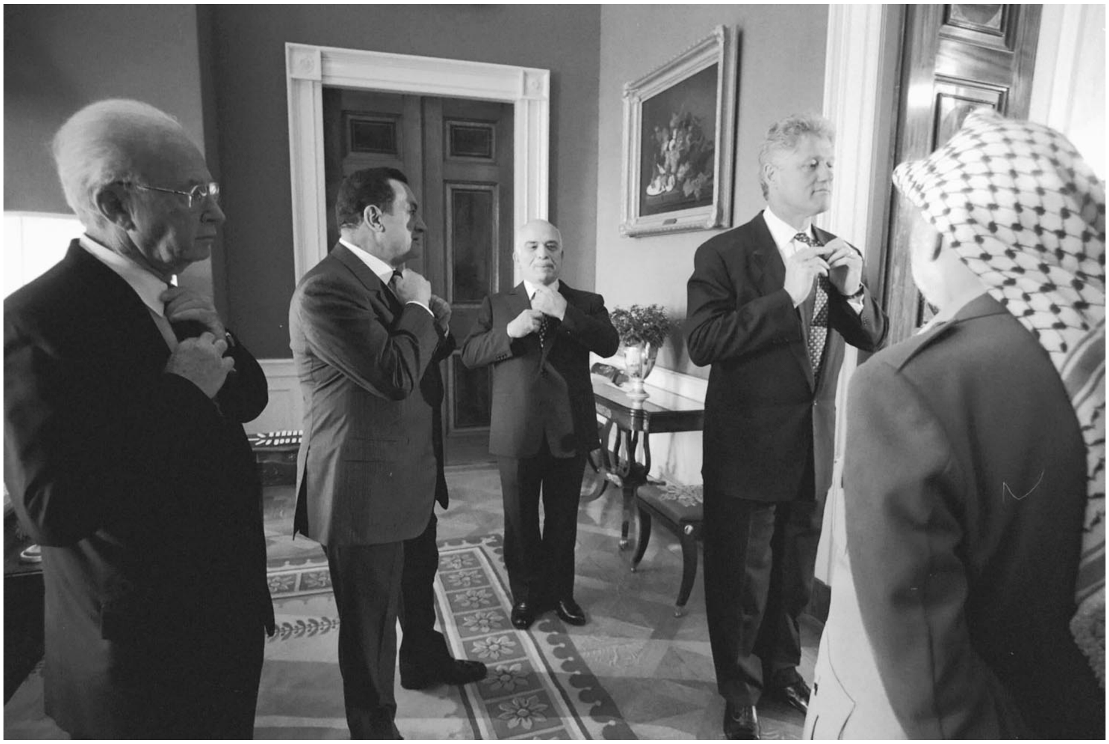
FIGURE 8.1 **NONCONSCIOUS MIMICRY** This graph shows the average number of times per minute participants performed an action (face rubbing, foot shaking) while in the presence of someone performing that action or not, demonstrating that people mindlessly mimic the behavior of those around them. Source: Adapted from Chartrand & Bargh, 1999.

REASONS FOR MIMICRY Why do we mindlessly copy the behavior of other people? There appear to be two reasons. William James (1890) provided the first explanation, arguing that merely thinking about a behavior makes performing that behavior more likely. Simply thinking about eating a bowl of ice cream, for example, makes us more apt to open the freezer, take out the carton, and dig in. The thought that we might type the wrong letter on the keyboard makes us more prone to typing that very letter (Lane, Groisman, & Ferreira, 2006; Wegner, 1994; Wegner, Ansfield, & Pilloff, 1998). This principle is based on the fact that the brain regions responsible for perception overlap with those responsible for action. When applied to mimicry, it means that when we see others behave in a particular way, that behavior is brought to mind (consciously or otherwise), making us more likely to behave that way ourselves.

The second reason we reflexively mimic others is to facilitate smooth, gratifying interaction and, in so doing, foster social connection. People tend to like those who mimic them more than they like those who don’t, even when they’re unaware of being mimicked (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). What’s more, people who have been mimicked tend to engage in more prosocial behavior (behavior intended to help others) immediately afterward, such as donating money to a good cause or leaving a larger tip for the person who mimicked them (van Baaren et al., 2003, 2004). Studies have shown that our tendency to mimic others is particularly strong when we feel a need to affiliate with others and when the others in question are well liked (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Hess, 2021; Lakin & Chartrand, 2003; Leighton et al., 2010; Stel et al., 2010). Mimicry seems to be a helpful first step toward goodwill and harmonious interaction.

Quite a bit of mimicry is asynchronous: You yawn and then the person next to you yawns. But a particularly powerful form of mimicry is synchronous: You and those around you yawn at the same time. Studies have shown that synchronized action can create especially powerful feelings of closeness and bonding. In one simple and very direct test of this idea, students were asked to tap a pencil in time with a metronome. They did so while the experimenter was also tapping in time with a separate metronome. For half of the participants, the metronomes were synched so that they and the experimenter tapped in time with one another. For the other half, the participants and the experimenter tapped at different times. Those who tapped in time with the experimenter reported liking the experimenter more than those who tapped out of phase did (Hove & Risen, 2009).

In another study, groups of three students were asked to walk around campus either in step with one another or as they normally would. Afterward, the students who walked in step with one another indicated that they felt more connected to one another and trusted each other more. They also made more trusting and cooperative decisions in an economic game (Wiltermuth & Heath, 2009; see also Jackson et al., 2018). Studies like this make it easy to understand why armies around the world practice marching together even though no one marches into battle anymore. Doing so facilitates an esprit de corps that fosters a more cohesive and committed fighting force.



AUTOMATIC CONFORMITY Seeing others behave in a particular way sometimes makes us nonconsciously mimic their postures, facial expressions, and behavior. Before the signing of a peace accord in 1995, U.S. president Bill Clinton, Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, and King Hussein of Jordan all adjusted their ties, as Yasser Arafat, who was not wearing a tie, looked on.

Informational Social Influence and Sherif’s Conformity Experiment

THE INFLUENCE OF FRAMES OF REFERENCE The surrounding context serves as a frame of reference we use in evaluating a stimulus. Here, the great height of most NBA players serves as a frame of reference for evaluating the height of a given player, John Lucas III of the Chicago Bulls. We see him as short even though, at 5’ 11”, he would seem a bit taller than average out in the world at large.

Sometimes people conform to one another a bit more consciously, as illustrated by an early conformity experiment by Muzafer Sherif (1936). Sherif was interested in how groups influence the behavior of individuals by shaping how they perceive reality. He noted that frames of reference influence even our most basic perceptions. Whether we think of someone as tall or short depends on the height of everyone else. John Lucas III, at 5’11’’ (see accompanying photo), would probably strike you as a bit taller than average if you saw him on campus. But he always looked short during his career as an NBA player. Sherif designed his study to examine how other people, in just this way, can serve as a *social* frame of reference to change our perception of reality.

Sherif’ s experiment was built around what’ s called the autokinetic illusion—the sense that a stationary point of light in a completely dark environment is moving. Ancient astronomers first noted this phenomenon, which occurs because in complete darkness there are no other stimuli, or frames of reference, to help the viewer discern where the light is located. Perhaps, Sherif thought, other people in such a completely dark space would serve as a social frame of reference that would influence the viewer’ s perceptions of the light’ s movement. To start, Sherif put individual participants in a darkened room alone, presented them with a stationary point of light on trial after trial, and had them estimate how far the light “moved” each time. Some people thought, on average, that the light moved very little on each trial (say, 2 inches), while others thought it moved a good deal more (say, 8 inches).

Sherif’ s next step was to bring several participants into the room together and have them call out their estimates. He found that people’ s estimates tended to converge over time. Those who individually had thought the light moved a considerable amount soon lowered their estimates; those who individually had thought the light moved very little soon raised theirs (**Figure 8.2**). Sherif argued that everyone’ s individual judgments quickly fused into a group norm that influenced how far participants saw the light move. A follow-up experiment reinforced his interpretation: When participants came back for individual testing up to one year later, their judgments still showed the influence of their group’s earlier responses (Rohrer et al., 1954).

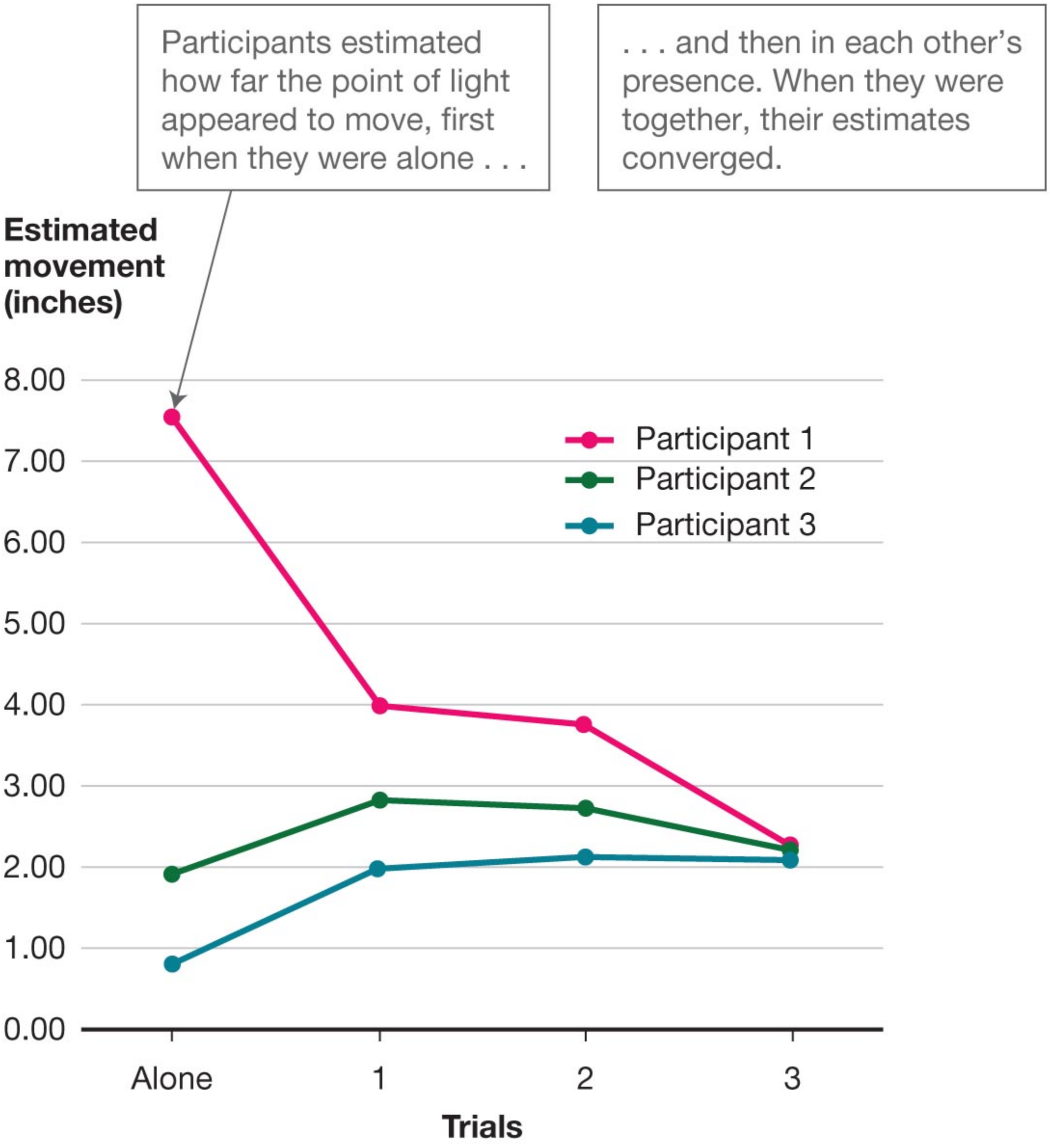


FIGURE 8.2 **INFORMATIONAL SOCIAL INFLUENCE** Sherif’s conformity experiment used the autokinetic illusion to assess group influence. Participants’ estimates tended to become more similar over time. Source: Adapted from Sherif, 1936.

Social psychologists typically interpret the behavior of Sherif's participants to be the result of informational social influence—the reliance on other people's comments and actions as an indication of what's likely to be correct, proper, or effective (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). We want to be right, and the opinions of other people can be a useful source of information to draw on. The tendency to draw on other people's comments, actions, and opinions as useful sources of information is most pronounced when we're uncertain about what is factually correct or when we're in unfamiliar situations and unsure how to behave. For example, we're more likely to conform to others' views on subjects we have only vague ideas about, such as macroeconomic policy, than on familiar topics, such as how much more fun it would be to vacation in Northern Italy versus North Korea (Sharps & Robinson, 2017; Tesser, Campbell, & Mickler, 1983). And we're more likely to conform to what others are doing when we are in a foreign country than when we are in the familiar environment of our own country. Note that the task Sherif asked his participants to perform was about as ambiguous as it gets, so informational social influence was strong. The light, in fact, didn't move at all—it just appeared to move.

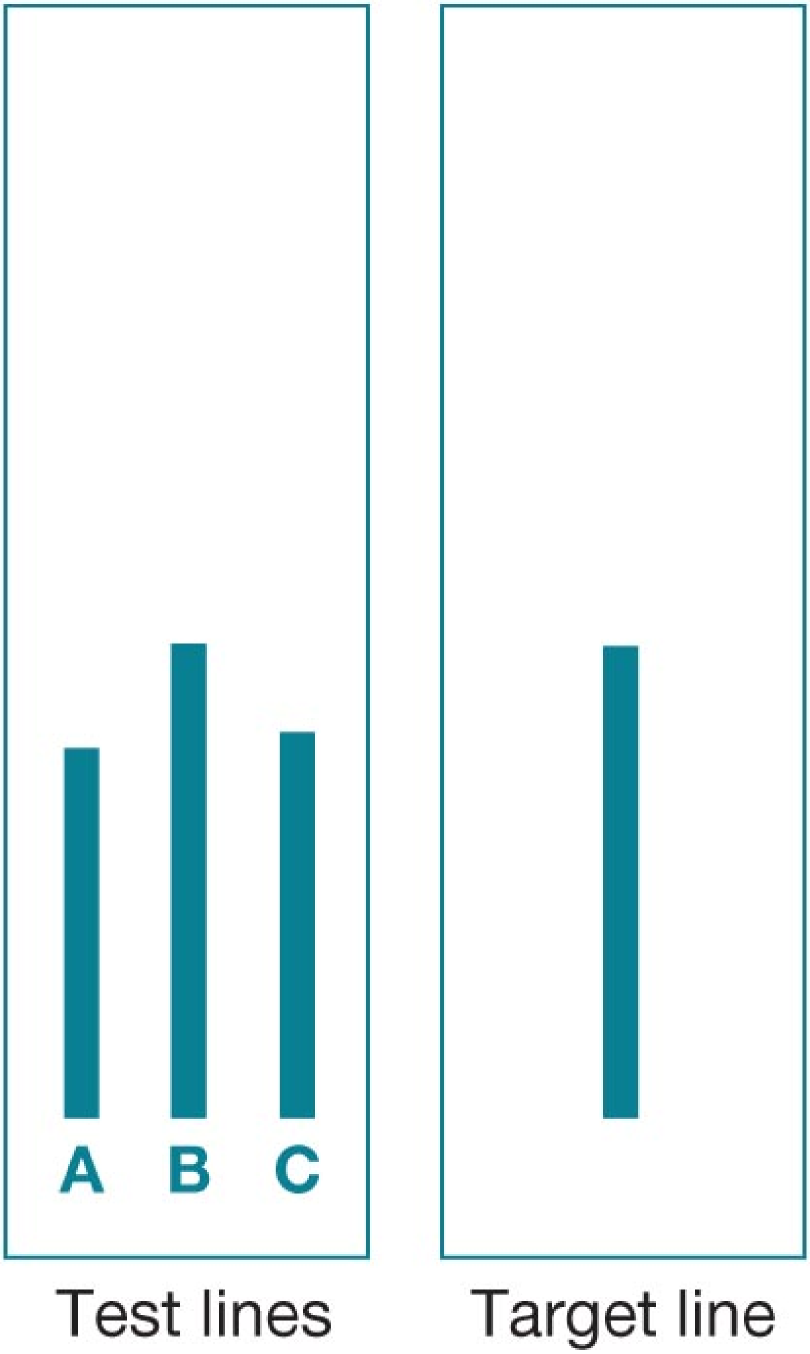
Informational social influence has a strong impact on the popularity of contemporary music. In one ingenious study, investigators allowed one group of participants to listen to whatever they wanted from a long list of largely unknown songs and to download any songs they especially liked (Salganik, Dodds, & Watts, 2006). These participants made their choices on their own, without any social influence. Other subjects, meanwhile, were assigned to one of eight "markets." These participants could see the choices made by their peers in that market, and that market only. What were their peers listening to and downloading? And critically, what influence did that knowledge have on their own choices? The decision of which songs are "good" and worth listening to is not at all clear and can be highly idiosyncratic, leaving room for informational social influence.

Indeed, the results were striking. In each of the eight markets, participants were far more likely to download songs that their in-market peers had downloaded. Thus, whatever songs a few people happened to listen to early on influenced the subsequent choices of others, creating very different music scenes in the eight different markets.

Normative Social Influence and Asch's Conformity Experiment

As you read about Sherif's autokinetic illusion study, you might have been wondering: What's the big deal here? It makes sense that participants conformed to one another's judgments. After all, there was in fact no right answer, and participants couldn't have felt confident in their own estimates. Why *not* rely on others? If this is your reaction, then you're thinking just like another pioneer of conformity research, psychologist Solomon Asch. Asch thought that Sherif's experiment, although informative about a certain type of conformity, didn't address situations in which there is a clear conflict between an individual's own judgment and that of the group. Sherif's findings don't apply, for example, to the conflict people might feel knowing that they would be better off getting vaccinated for COVID-19 but also knowing that their families wouldn't approve. Asch predicted that in a case of clear conflict between a person's own position and the viewpoint of the group, there would be far less conformity than what Sherif observed. He was right. There is less conformity in those circumstances. The reduced rate of conformity, however, was not what made Asch's experiment one of the most famous in the history of psychology. What made his study so well-known was how often participants actually *did* conform, even when they thought the group’s viewpoint was completely wrongheaded (Levine, 1999; Prislin & Crano, 2012).

In this famous experiment (Asch, 1956), eight students (all men) were gathered together to perform a simple perceptual task: determining which of three lines was the same length as a target line (**Figure 8.3**). Each person called out his judgment publicly, one at a time. The task was so easy that the experience was uneventful, boring even—at first.


A
B
C
Test lines
Target line

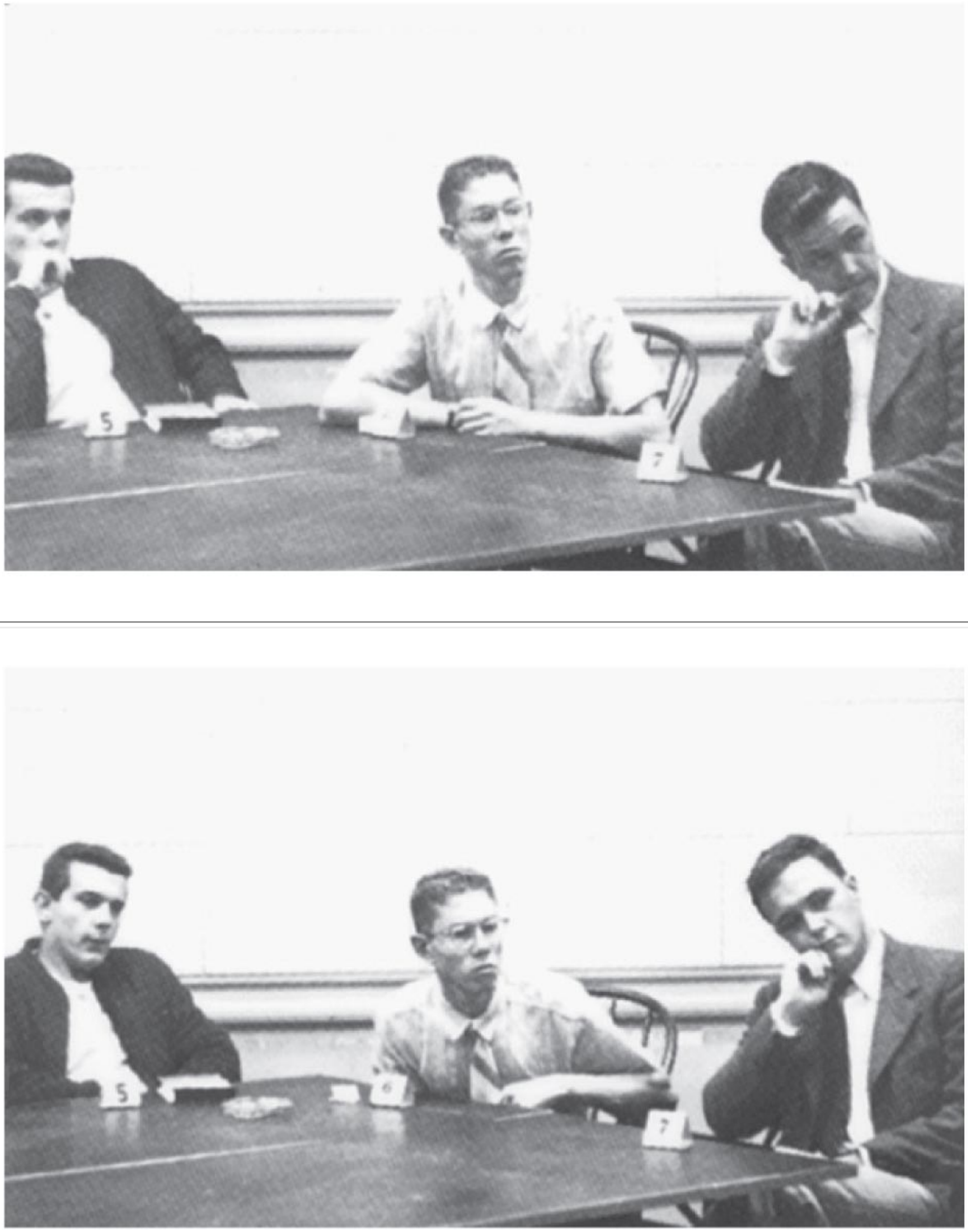


FIGURE 8.3 **NORMATIVE SOCIAL INFLUENCE** Participants in Asch’s conformity study had a difficult time understanding why everyone appeared to be seeing things incorrectly. Even though it was clear to them what the right answer was, they ended up going along with the erroneous majority a third of the time. Source: Adapted from Asch, 1956.

On the third trial, however, one participant found that his private judgment was at odds with the expressed opinions of everyone else in the group. He was the only true participant in the experiment; the seven others were confederates instructed by Asch to respond incorrectly. The confederates responded incorrectly on 11 more occasions before the experiment was over. The question was how often the participant would forsake what he knew to be the correct answer and conform to the incorrect judgment given by everyone else. In this study, there was no ambiguity as there had been in Sherif’s experiment: The right answer was clear. (When participants in a control group made these judgments by themselves, with no social pressure, they almost never made a mistake.)

As Asch predicted, there was less conformity in his study than in Sherif’s, but the rate of caving in to the group was still surprisingly high. Three-quarters of the participants conformed to the group’s incorrect answer at least once. Overall, participants conformed on a third of the critical trials. These results aren’t simply surprising; they are disturbing as well. We like to think of people, ourselves especially, as sticking to what we think is right rather than following the herd (Pronin, Berger, & Molouki, 2007; Wice & Davidai, 2021). In addition, we worry about people abandoning the dictates of their own conscience to follow others into wrongheaded or potentially destructive behavior.

There is undoubtedly some *informational* social influence, discussed in the previous section, at work in Asch’s experiment: The incorrect judgments called out by the confederates were for lines that were only 0.5–0.75 inch off the correct answer, so some participants may have questioned their own judgment and regarded the confederates’ responses as reliable sources of information. However, control participants who were not subject to social pressure got the answer right nearly 100 percent of the time, so there shouldn’t have been much uncertainty about the correct response. Thus, informational social influence was not the main cause of conformity. The primary reason people conformed was to avoid standing out negatively in the eyes of the group. Social psychologists refer to this kind of influence as normative social influence—the desire to avoid being criticized, disapproved of, or shunned (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955).

People are often reluctant to depart from the norms of society, or at least the norms of the groups they care most about, because they fear the social consequences (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991). Consider what happened to Wyoming’s sole member of the House of Representatives, Liz Cheney. At the time of the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, Cheney was the chair of the House Republican Conference, the third-highest position in the House Republican leadership. But when she voted to impeach President Donald Trump, her Republican colleagues in the House voted to remove her from her leadership position. Normative social influence stems from the fear that such punishment from one’s peers is possible. That fear has led many of Cheney’s Republican colleagues to remain silent about the insurrection and Trump’s role in it, even as they have been highly critical in private (DeBonis & Sotomayor, 2021).

> “‘The way to get along,’ I was told when I entered Congress, ‘is to go along.’”
>
> —JOHN F. KENNEDY

In Asch’s experiment, the normative social pressures were sufficiently intense that the participants found themselves in a wrenching dilemma: “Should I say what I truly think the answer is? But what would everyone else think if I did that?

They all agree, and they all seem so confident. Will they think I’m daft? Will they interpret my disagreement as a slap in the face? But what kind of person am I if I go along with them? What the #@!$% should I do?”

To get an idea of the intensity of this dilemma, imagine the following scenario. As part of a discussion of Asch’s experiment, your social psychology professor shows an image of the target line and the three test lines and reports that although the right answer is line B, the confederates all say it’s C. As your professor begins to move on, one student raises his hand and announces with conviction, “But the right answer *is* C!”

What would happen? Probably everyone would chuckle, making the charitable assumption that the student was trying to be funny. But if the student continued to insist that the confederates’ answer was correct, the chuckles would turn to nervous laughter, and everyone would turn toward the professor in an implicit plea to “make this awkward situation go away.” In subsequent lectures, people might avoid sitting by the nonconformist, and lunch invitations, dating opportunities, and offers to join a study group would likely diminish as well. Negative social repercussions like these are what Asch’s participants likely felt they risked if they departed from the majority’s response. Perhaps it’s no surprise, then, that participants in Asch’s studies and many subsequent investigations have so often chosen not to take the risk and instead to conform to the majority response (Janes & Olson, 2000; Kruglanski & Webster, 1991; Levine, 1989; Lisciandra, Postma-Nilsenovà, & Colombo, 2013; Schachter, 1951).

Factors Affecting Conformity Pressure

Several generations of researchers have examined a number of variables that influence the tendency to conform. These include the characteristics of the group; the surrounding context, including cultural influences; and the task or issue at hand. (See **Box 8.1** for another determinant of people’s readiness to conform.) This research has provided a clearer understanding of when people are especially likely to conform and when they’re less likely to do so. Both informational and normative social influences are powerful forces: Change either one, and the rate of conformity changes as well.

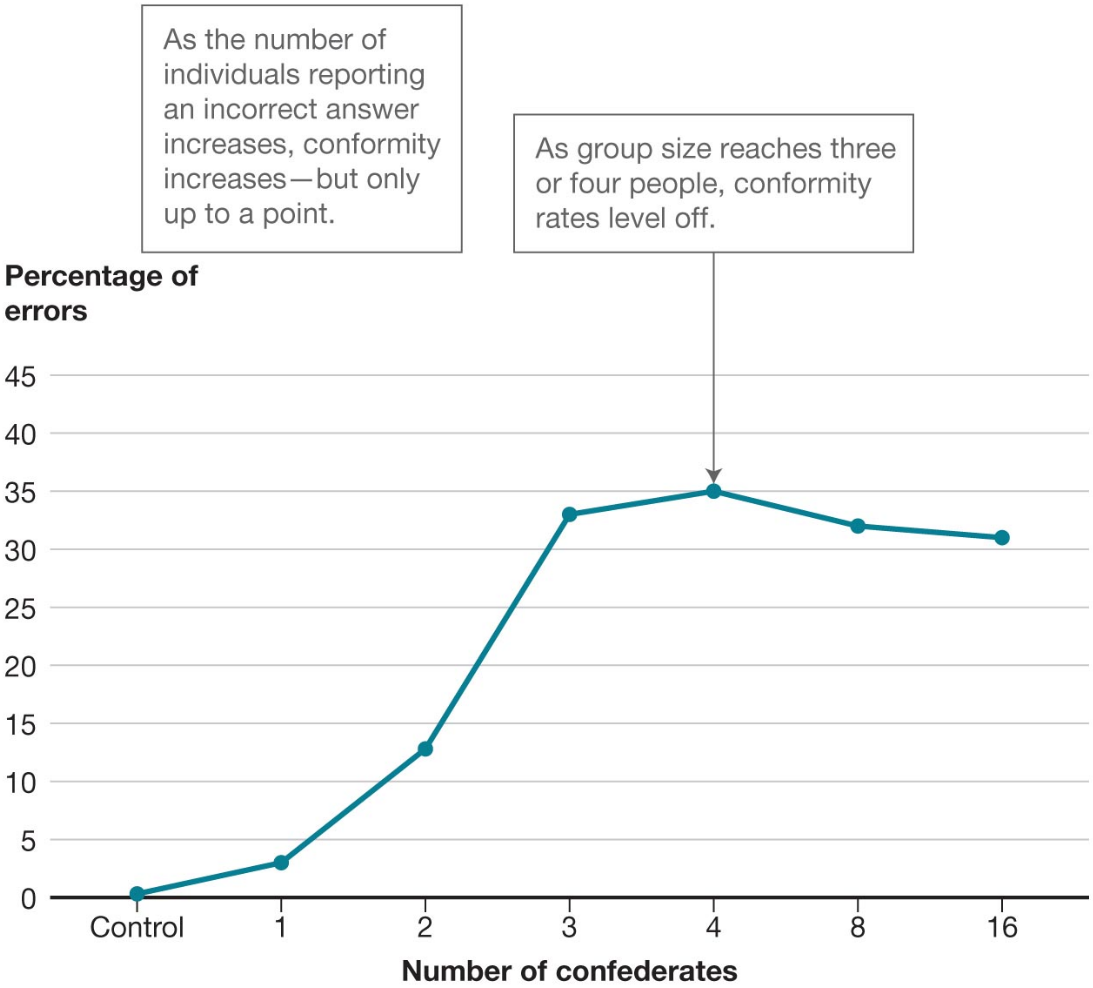


FIGURE 8.4 **THE EFFECT OF GROUP SIZE ON CONFORMITY** As the number of people in a majority increases, so does the tendency to conform, but only up to a unanimous majority of three or four. After that, conformity levels off. Source: Adapted from Asch, 1951.

GROUP SIZE It’s probably no surprise that people are more likely to conform to a bigger group. What *is* surprising, perhaps, is that the effect of group size levels off pretty quickly (**Figure 8.4**). Research using Asch’s paradigm, for example, has shown an increase in conformity as the size of the group increases, but only to a group size of three or four; after that, the amount of conformity levels off (Bond, 2005; Campbell & Fairey, 1989; Gerard, Wilhelmy, & Conolley, 1968; Insko et al., 1985; L. A. Rosenberg, 1961).

> “It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends.”
>
> —ALBUS DUMBLEDORE, IN *HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER’S STONE*

When we consider informational social influence, it makes sense that the more people who express a particular opinion, the more likely it is that the opinion has merit as a source of information—but only to a certain point. The validity of a consensus opinion increases only if the individual opinions are independent of one another. And the more people there are, the less likely it is that their views are independent; therefore, additional consenting opinions don’t offer any additional real information.

As for normative social influence, it makes sense that the larger the group, the more people one stands to displease, so conformity is more likely. But here, too, group size has an impact only up to a point. A person can feel only so much embarrassment, and the difference between being viewed as odd, foolish, or difficult by 2 versus 4 people is psychologically much more powerful than the difference between being viewed that way by, say, 12 versus 14 people.

BOX 8.1

Not So Fast: **Critical Thinking About Conformity and Construal**

A common reaction to learning about Asch’s experiment is to think, “Wow, if people conform that much to a group of strangers, imagine how much they’d conform to the judgments of people they care about and have to deal with in the future!” Indeed, it is true that normative social influence is diminished in situations, like Asch’s, where people care less about others’ judgments because everyone is a stranger and they all assume they’ll never see one another again (Lott & Lott, 1961; Wolf, 1985).

Yet there are other, more subtle aspects of Asch’s procedure that can lead to *more* conformity than usually occurs in daily life. Participants in Asch’s experiment faced a double whammy. First, they had to confront the fact that everyone else saw things differently than they did. Second, they had no basis for understanding *why* everyone else saw things differently. (“Could I be mistaken? No, it’s as plain as day. Could they be mistaken? I don’t see how, because they’re not any farther away than I am and it’s so clear. Are they unusual? No, they don’t look much different from me or anyone else.”)

If we can pinpoint a reason why our opinions are different (“They don’t see things the way I do because they’re wearing distorting glasses”), both informational influence and normative social influence weaken. Informational social influence decreases because the explanation for the difference of opinion can diminish the group’s impact as a source of information (“They’re biased”). Normative social influence decreases because we can assume that those in the majority are aware of why we differ from them. For instance, if we have different views on some burning political issue of the day, those who disagree with us might think we’re biased, selfish, or have different values, but at least they won’t think we’re crazy. In Asch’s situation, in contrast, the participants faced the reasonable fear that if they departed from everyone else’s judgment, their behavior would look truly bizarre, and everyone would think they were nuts.

The broader lesson here is about the importance of construal, even in the context of experiments. As we have stressed throughout this book, people respond not to the objective situations they face but to their subjective interpretations of those situations. Participants in Asch’s study were in a situation in which it was unusually hard to develop a compelling interpretation of what was going on. And it’s hard to act independently and decisively when things have stopped making sense, so it may be a mistake to assume that Asch’s participants would conform even more outside the psychology lab (L. Ross, Bierbrauer, & Hoffman, 1976).

To understand the real meaning of any experiment, it’s important to pay attention to how the participants might have interpreted the instructions, procedures, and stimuli they faced. Likewise, experimenters must pay attention to the meaning that participants are apt to give their experience in the lab in order to design studies that constitute truly informative tests of their hypotheses. Running participants in experiments isn’t the same as running rats in mazes: People don’t passively record and respond to the surrounding context; they actively construe it and respond to what they’ve construed.

GROUP UNANIMITY A striking effect was observed in Asch’s studies when the group was not entirely unanimous. Recall that in the basic paradigm, the participant went along with the confederates and reported the wrong answer a third of the time. That figure dropped precipitously when the true participant had an ally—that is, when just one other member of the group deviated from the majority (**Figure 8.5**). This effect occurs because the presence of an ally weakens both informational social influence (“Maybe I’m right after all”) and normative social influence (“At least I’ve got someone to stand by me”). This effect suggests a powerful tool for protecting independence of thought and action: If you expect to be pressured to conform and want to remain true to your beliefs, bring along an ally. Indeed, an important subtext of Asch’s research is just how hard it can be to go it alone. People can stand up to misguided peers, but they usually need some help. Being the lone dissenter can be agonizingly difficult.

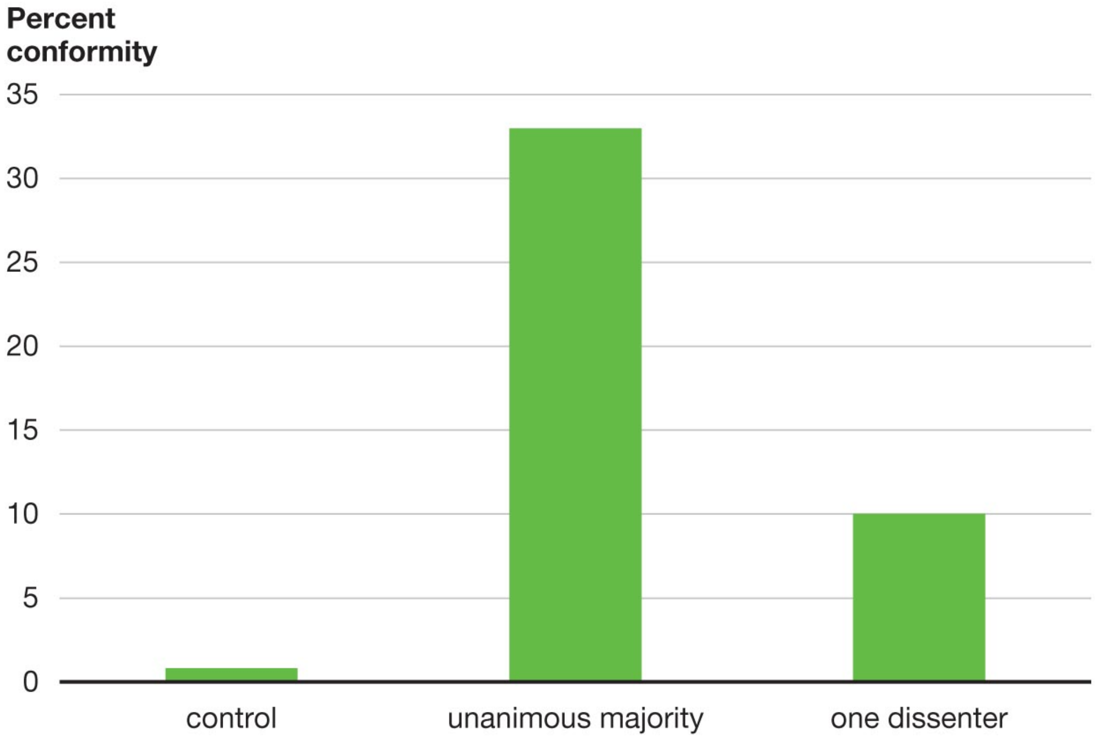


FIGURE 8.5 **THE EFFECT OF GROUP UNANIMITY ON CONFORMITY** The tendency for people to go along with a misguided majority drops precipitously when there is just one other person willing to dissent. Source: Adapted from Asch, 1955.

> “If there is any principle of the Constitution that more imperatively calls for attachment than any other it is the principle of free thought—not free thought for those who agree with us but freedom for the thought that we hate.”
>
> —OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

Note that the other person who breaks the group’s unanimity doesn’t need to offer the correct answer—just something that departs from the group’s answer (Asch, 1955; Morris & Miller, 1975; Wilder & Allen, 1977). Suppose the right answer is the shortest of the three lines, and the majority claims it’s the longest. If the fellow dissenter states that the middle line is the correct match, it still reduces the rate of conformity even though the participant’s own view (that it’s the shortest line) hasn’t been reinforced. What matters is the break in unanimity. This fact has important implications for free speech. It suggests that we might want to tolerate loathsome and obviously false statements (“The Gates Foundation engineered the coronavirus pandemic”; “The World Trade Center attacks were a government hoax”) not because what is said has any value but because it liberates *other people* to make atypical remarks that *are* of value. The presence of voices, even bizarre or patently wrongheaded ones, that depart from conventional opinion can encourage other people (and the body politic as a whole) to speak out and thus can foster productive political discourse.

ANONYMITY If standing up to a misguided majority is hard, what happens when people can register dissent without calling attention to themselves? In other words, what happens when the response is anonymous? Anonymity eliminates normative social influence and therefore should substantially reduce conformity. Indeed, when the true participants in Asch’s paradigm were allowed to write their judgments on a piece of paper instead of having to say them aloud for the group to hear, conformity dropped dramatically. When nobody else is aware of your judgment, there is no need to fear the group’s disapproval.

This effect highlights an important distinction between the impacts of informational and normative social influence. Informational social influence, by guiding how we come to see the issues or stimuli before us, leads to internalization, or the private acceptance of the position advanced by the majority (Kelman, 1958; S. Winter, Remmelswaal, & Vos, 2021). We don’t just mimic a particular response—we adopt the group’s perspective. Normative social influence, in contrast, often has a greater impact on public compliance than on private acceptance. That is, to avoid disapproval, we sometimes do or say one thing but continue to believe another.

EXPERTISE AND STATUS Suppose you were a participant in Asch’s experiment, and the other participants who were inexplicably stating what you thought was the wrong answer were all former major-league batting champions. If you proceeded on the assumption that a player can’t lead the league in hitting without exceptional eyesight, you’d probably grant the group considerable authority and go along with the group’s opinion. In contrast, if the rest of the participants were all wearing thick eyeglasses, you’d be less apt to take their opinions seriously.

EXPERTISE, STATUS, AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, fear and anxiety were running high, and people across the United States turned to Anthony Fauci for guidance about what to do. Dr. Fauci had earned great credibility during his 50-year career as an immunologist, which included his service as director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

(NIAID) and as advisor to every U.S. president since Ronald Reagan in the 1980s.

As this thought experiment illustrates, the expertise and status of the group members powerfully influence the rate of conformity. Expertise and status often go together: We grant greater status to those with expertise, and we often assume (not always correctly) that those with high status are experts (Koslowsky & Schwarzwald, 2001). To the extent that these characteristics can be separated, however, expertise primarily affects informational social influence. Experts are more likely to be right, so we take their opinions more seriously as sources of information. Status, in contrast, mainly affects normative social influence. High-status individuals can do more to hurt our social standing than lower-status individuals can.

Many researchers have examined the effects of expertise and status on conformity (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Crano, 1970; Driskell & Mullen, 1990; Ettinger et al., 1971). One of the most intriguing studies of status used a paradigm quite different from Asch’s. E. Paul Torrance (1955) gave the members of navy bombing crews—pilot, navigator, and gunner—a number of reasoning problems, such as this horse-trading problem:

> A man bought a horse for $60 and then sold it for $70. He later repurchased the horse for $80 and then, changing his mind yet again, sold it for $90. How much money did he make on his series of transactions? Click below to see the correct answer.

The crew then had to report one answer for the whole group. Torrance monitored the group’s deliberations and found that if the pilot (who generally held the highest status) originally came up with the correct solution, the group eventually reported it as their answer 91 percent of the time.

If the navigator offered the correct answer, the group ended up reporting the correct answer 80 percent of the time. But if the lowly gunner offered the correct answer, the group offered it up only 63 percent of the time. The opinions of higher-status individuals thus tend to carry more weight (Foushee, 1984).

CULTURE As we emphasize throughout this book, people from interdependent cultures are much more concerned about their relationships with others and about fitting into the broader social context than people from independent cultures are. People reared in interdependent cultures are therefore likely to be more susceptible to both informational social influence (they consider the actions and opinions of others to be very telling) and normative social influence (they consider the high regard of others to be very important). Thus, people from interdependent cultures might be expected to conform more often than those from independent cultures.

Evidence supports this contention. An analysis of the results of 133 experiments using the Asch paradigm in 17 countries found that conformity does indeed tend to be greater in interdependent countries (R. Bond & Smith, 1996). The individualism that is highly valued in American and Western European societies has encouraged individuals in those independent cultures to be more willing to stand apart from the majority.

TIGHT AND LOOSE CULTURES Michele Gelfand and her colleagues have pursued a distinction between cultures that overlaps somewhat with the independent-interdependent dimension but differs enough that it deserves a name of its own: tightness versus looseness (Elster & Gelfand, 2021; Gelfand, 2018; Gelfand et al., 2011). Conformity to social norms lies at the heart of this construct. Some cultures, which Gelfand calls “tight,” have strong norms regarding how people should behave, and they don’t readily tolerate departure from those norms. Other cultures are “loose”: Their norms aren’t as strong, and their members tolerate more deviance.

In a highly ambitious study, the Gelfand team examined a number of variables in 33 nations (Gelfand et al., 2011). They found that compared with loose nations, tight nations are more likely to have autocratic or dictatorial governments, to punish dissent, to have sharp controls on what can be said in the media, to have more laws and higher monitoring to ensure that the laws are obeyed, and to inflict more punishment for disobedience. If a nation was tight on one of these dimensions, it tended to be tight on all; if it was loose on one, it tended to be loose on all. Tight countries include India, Germany, the People’s Republic of China, South Korea, Japan, Austria, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Turkey, and Italy. Loose countries include Greece, Hungary, Israel, the Netherlands, Ukraine, New Zealand, and Brazil. You probably guessed that the United States is relatively loose, which it is—on the whole. But there’s great variation across the 50 states on almost everything, including how tight or loose they are. California, Nevada, and Maine are rather loose, whereas Mississippi, Kansas, and Texas are rather tight (Harrington & Gelfand, 2014).

Gelfand and her colleagues asked people in each of the 33 countries about the appropriateness of arguing, crying, laughing, singing, flirting, reading a newspaper, and several other behaviors in each of 15 different social situations or places, such as a doctor’s office, a restaurant, and a movie theater (Gelfand et al., 2011). The tighter the nation’s laws and norms, the fewer of these behaviors were allowed in these various situations. The researchers also asked people if their country had many social norms, whether others would strongly disapprove if someone acted inappropriately, and so forth. Citizens in tighter nations pointed to tighter constraints.

(A)

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(B)

TIGHT VERSUS LOOSE CULTURES (A) As this picture of Chinese students lined up for school illustrates, some cultures are relatively tight; they have strong norms about how people should behave and tolerate very little leeway in deviating from those norms. (B) Other cultures are relatively loose; their norms aren’t as stringent, as this more chaotic line indicates.

Why are some nations tight and others loose? The Gelfand team found that tighter nations tend to have higher population densities, fewer natural resources, less reliable food supplies, less access to safe water, greater risk of natural disasters, more territorial threats from neighbors, and a higher prevalence of pathogens (Gelfand et al., 2011). It appears, then, that behavioral constraints are associated with, and perhaps partly caused by, ecological constraints. Necessity has been described as the mother of invention, and it appears to give birth to cultural tightness as well.

The Influence of Minority Opinion on the Majority

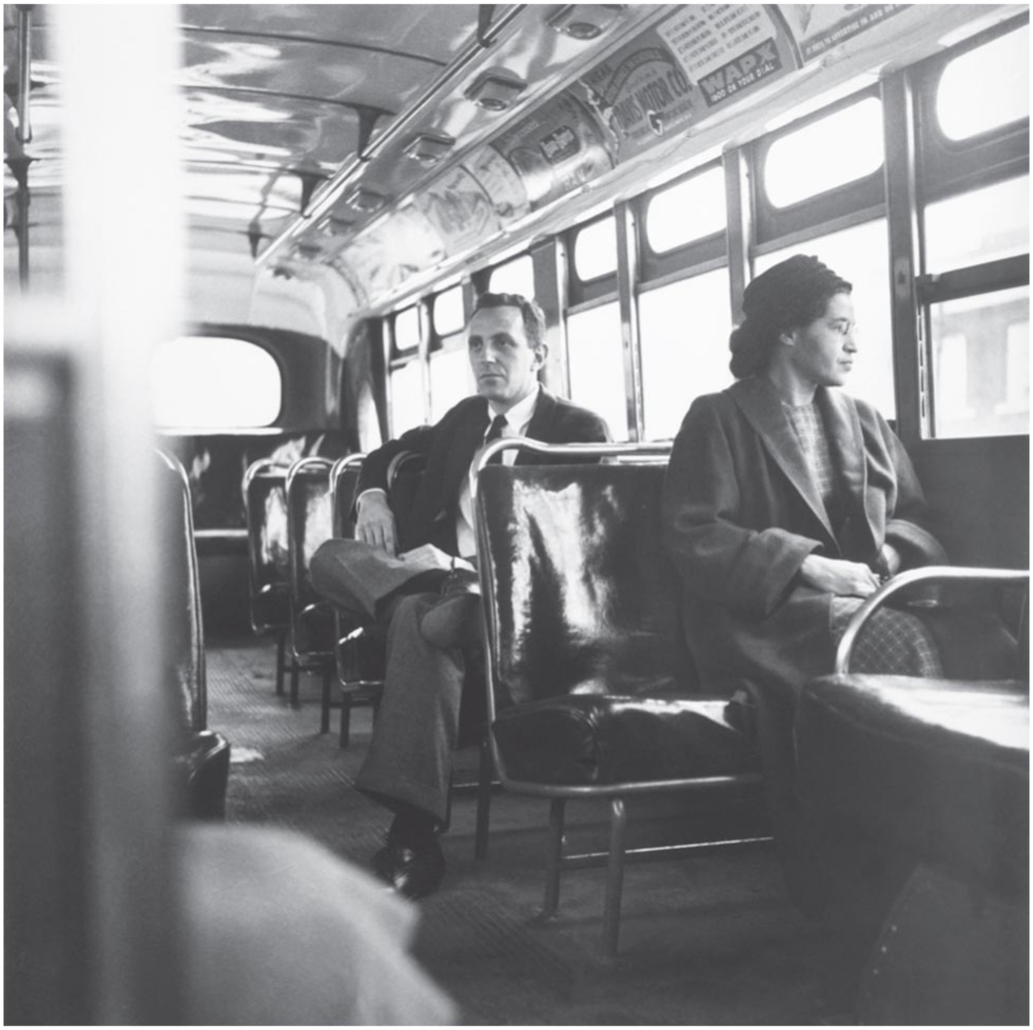
There were times in the United States when some people enslaved others, when women weren’t allowed to vote, and when children worked long hours for scandalously low pay in unhealthy conditions. But small groups of abolitionists, suffragettes, and child welfare advocates saw things differently than their peers. They worked tirelessly to change public opinion about each of these issues—and they succeeded. In each case, the broader public changed its views, and important legislation was passed. Minority opinion became the majority opinion. One of the most dramatic examples of minority influence in much of the developed world is quite recent. Over the past 25 years, the acceptance of same-sex marriage has grown from a small minority opinion to a majority opinion today.

Examples like these remind us that although conformity pressures can be powerful, majority opinion doesn’t always prevail. It’s possible to resist conformity pressure, and minority voices are sometimes persuasive enough to change the prevailing norms. How do minority opinions come to influence the majority? Are the sources of influence the same as those that majorities bring to bear on minorities?

> “Give me a firm place to stand and I will move the world.”
>
> —ARCHIMEDES OF SYRACUSE

In the first experimental examination of these questions, Serge Moscovici and his colleagues had groups of participants call out whether a color was green or blue (Moscovici, Lage, & Naffrechoux, 1969). The border between blue and green isn’t always clear, but the critical stimuli the participants saw were ones that, when tested alone, participants nearly always thought were blue (99 percent of the time). The experimenter showed participants these stimuli in a setting where they could hear one another’s responses, including those of a minority group of respondents (confederates of the study) who all responded alike. When the confederates varied their collective responses between “green” and “blue,” the participants said “green” after the confederates did so only 1 percent of the time, about the same as when participants were tested alone. But when the confederates responded with “green” consistently, the participants responded with “green” 8 percent of the time.

(A)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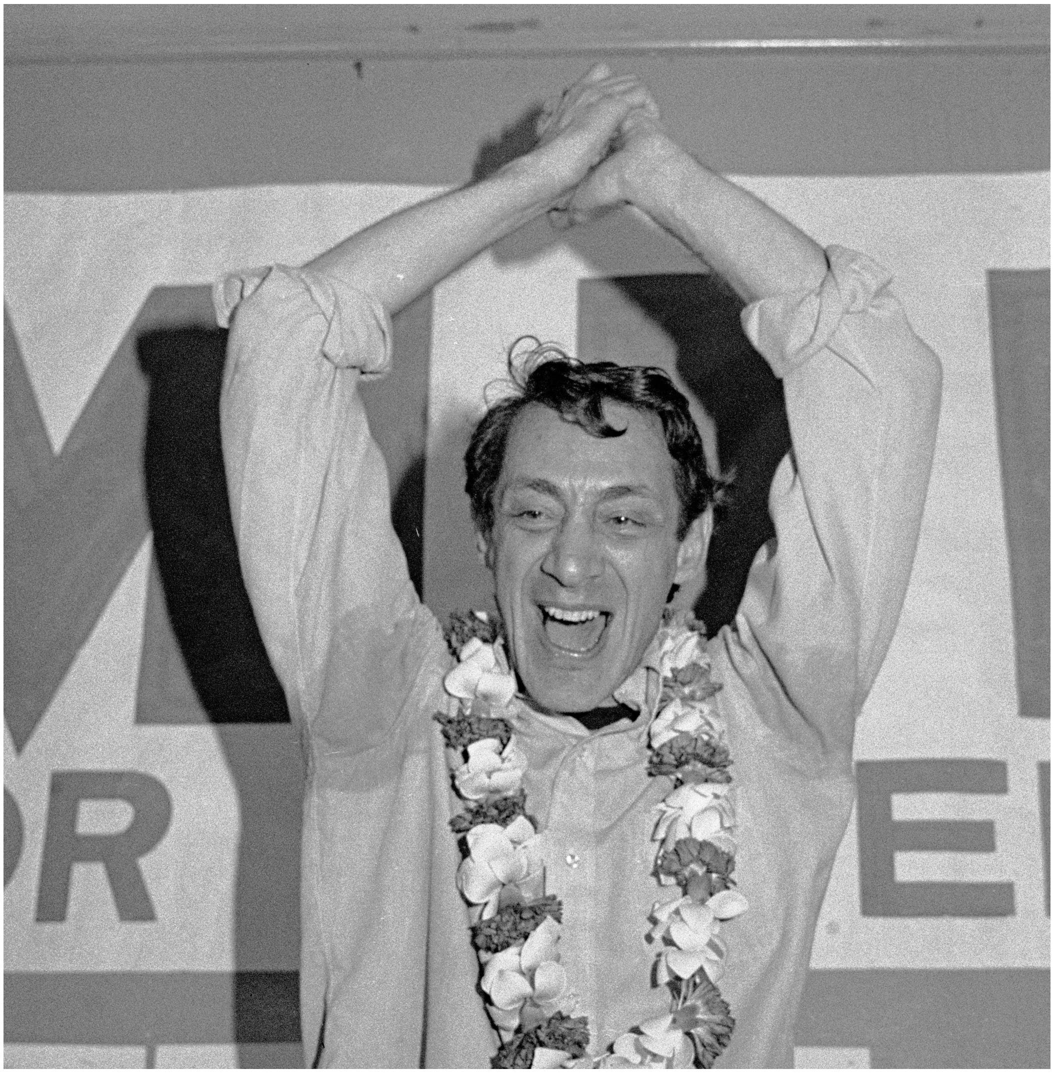

(C)

MINORITY INFLUENCE ON THE MAJORITY Minority opinions can influence the majority through consistent and clear messages that persuade the majority to systematically examine and reevaluate its opinions. (A) British suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst presented her views in favor of women’ s right to vote to an American crowd in 1918. (B) Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat at the front of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, in December 1955. Her actions resulted in a citywide bus boycott that eventually led the U.S. Supreme Court to declare segregation illegal on the city bus system. (C) Harvey Milk was the first openly gay person to be elected to public office in California. His activism contributed to the much greater support for the civil rights of LGBTQ individuals that we see today.

The influence of the consistent minority showed up in other ways as well. When the participants thought the study was over, the experimenter introduced them to a second investigator. This second investigator showed participants a series of blue-green colors and recorded where each participant, individually, thought blue left off and green began. Those who had earlier been exposed to a consistent minority now identified more of these stimuli as green; their sense of the border between blue and green had shifted. Thus, when the minority opinion was consistent, it had both an immediate effect on participants’ responses in the public setting and a latent effect on their subsequent private judgments.

Further investigations of minority influence have shown that minorities have their effect primarily through informational social influence rather than through normative social influence (Moscovici, 1985; Nemeth, 1986; W. Wood et al., 1994). People in the majority are typically not terribly concerned about the social costs of stating their opinion out loud—they have the majority on their side and normative social influence is minimal. But they might wonder why the minority keeps stating its divergent opinion. This can lead the majority to consider the stimulus more carefully, resulting in a level of scrutiny and systematic thought that can produce genuine change in attitudes and beliefs. Thus, majorities typically elicit more conformity, but it is often of the public compliance sort. In contrast, minorities typically influence fewer people, but the nature of the influence is often deeper and results in true private attitude change (Maass & Clark, 1983).

LOOKING BACK

Conformity can be a response to implicit or explicit social pressure, and it can be the result of automatic mimicry, informational social influence, or normative social influence. Group size influences conformity, but it appears to reach maximum effect at around four people. Unanimity is also crucial in conformity, and a single ally can help an individual hold out against the group. People conform more to those with high status or expertise, and they conform more when they must express their opinions publicly rather than register them in private. People from interdependent cultures conform more than people from independent cultures do, and the pressures to conform are greater in tight cultures than in loose ones. Conformity pressures notwithstanding, minorities can make an impact, primarily through informational social influence.

Glossary

informational social influence
The influence of other people that results from taking their comments or actions as a source of information about what is correct, proper, or effective.

normative social influence
The influence of other people that comes from the desire to avoid their disapproval and other social sanctions (ridicule, barbs, ostracism).

internalization
Private acceptance of a proposition, orientation, or ideology.

Compliance

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Define the norm of reciprocity and explain how it can be used to elicit compliance.
- Describe the different types of norms and their powerful effect on behavior.
- Explain how moods influence people’s willingness to comply with requests.

You need a favor from a friend. How should you ask? You’re trying to raise funds for a favorite charity. How should you go about getting people to donate their hard-earned money? Your first job out of college is in sales. How do you get people to sign on the dotted line? These are all questions about compliance: getting people to agree to something you want. Coming from the other direction, how can you avoid being influenced by the compliance attempts of others? What techniques should you watch out for? Social psychologists have studied different strategies for eliciting compliance, and their research findings help explain how—and how effectively—these strategies work (Cialdini, 2008, 2016; Goldstein, Martin, & Cialdini, 2008).

Different requests directed at different people—and to people in different contexts—have to be tailored accordingly. The details matter. Nevertheless, there are some general principles governing compliance that you should keep in mind when deciding the best way to ask for what you want. Let’s look at three of them in some depth. First, as we saw in Chapter 6, people find inconsistency unpleasant, so appeals to consistency and past commitments can be very effective. Second, norms are powerful determinants of behavior, so any appeal can benefit from an understanding of the prevailing norms. Finally, people’s moods often drive their behavior, so appeals can succeed or fail because they come at just the right or wrong time.

Consistency, Commitment, and the Foot-in-the-Door Technique

All of us perform certain actions because they’re consistent with our self-image. Environmentalists take the time to recycle, even when they’re sorely tempted to toss a bottle or can into a nearby trash can, because recycling is part of what it means to be an environmentalist. Skiers rise early to tackle fresh snow, even when they really want to hit the snooze button on the alarm clock, because that’s what real skiing enthusiasts do. It’s logical, therefore, that if requests are crafted to appeal to a person’s self-image, the likelihood of compliance increases.

One way to appeal to a person’s self-image is to employ what’s known as the foot-in-the-door technique (Burger & Guadagno, 2003; Comello, Myrick, & Raphiou, 2016; Dillard, Hunter, & Burgoon, 1984; Freedman & Fraser, 1966; Souchet & Girandola, 2013). It starts with a small request to which nearly everyone complies, thereby allowing the person making the request to get a foot in the door. This person then follows up with a larger request involving the real behavior of interest. The idea is that the target person’s initial agreement to the small request will lead to a change in self-image as someone who does this sort of thing or who contributes to such causes. This person then has a reason for agreeing to the subsequent, larger request: “It’s just who I am.”

In an early test of this technique, investigators knocked on doors in a residential neighborhood and asked one group of homeowners if they would be willing to have a large billboard sign bearing the slogan “Drive Carefully” installed in their front yard for one week (Freedman & Fraser, 1966). They were shown a picture of the sign. It was large and unattractive, so not surprisingly, only 17 percent agreed to the request. Another group of residents was approached with a much smaller request—to display in a window of their home a 3-inch-square sign bearing the phrase “Be a Safe Driver.” Virtually all of them agreed with the request. Two weeks later, when this group was asked to display the billboard in their yard (receiving the very same request as those in the first group), a staggering 76 percent of the homeowners agreed to do so.

THE FOOT-IN-THE-DOOR TECHNIQUE After getting this customer to agree to a test drive, it may be easier for the salesperson to close the deal and have her buy the car.

You’ve probably heard politicians oppose a piece of legislation not because there’s anything wrong with the legislation itself but because they think it might create a “slippery slope,” leading to the passage of more questionable legislation later on. Research on the foot-in-the-door technique suggests that there is merit to this concern. Human behavior, like a ball rolling down a sloping plane, is subject to momentum. Getting people started on something small often makes it easier to get them to do much bigger things down the road. We’ll see just how powerful these slippery slopes can be when we discuss the most famous research in all of social psychology later in this chapter.

Norm-Based Compliance

Adolescent girls exposed to pregnant peers are more likely to become pregnant themselves (Akerlof, Yellen, & Katz, 1996), planning for retirement is greatly influenced by coworkers’ plans (Duflo & Saez, 2003), and student drinking is connected to students’ perceptions of how much other students drink (M. A. Lewis & Neighbors, 2004). The tendency to act as those around us do can be harnessed to achieve compliance with explicit requests or implicit suggestions. As the moral psychologist Joshua Greene (2013) put it, “The best way to get people to do something is to tell them that their neighbors are already doing it.”

BOX 8.2

FOCUS ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Using Norms to Conserve Energy

Letting people know what others are doing can be used to help combat the climate crisis. Consider a norm-based approach to energy use that was instituted in California (Schultz et al., 2007). Researchers left hangtags on people’s doors indicating their average daily residential energy use (in kilowatt-hours) alongside their neighbors’ usage. The effect of this simple intervention was clear-cut and immediate: Those who consumed more energy than average altered their habits to significantly reduce their energy use.

What about the households that used *less* energy than average? Did telling them that their neighbors tended to be less conscientious make them more wasteful? Yes, it did. But the investigators had a simple remedy at hand that preserved the decrease in energy use among the energy wasters while avoiding increased energy use by the energy savers. The usage information given to half the households was accompanied by a small sign of approval or disapproval: a happy face for those who had used relatively little energy and a sad face for those who had used more than average. The signal of approval was enough to maintain the superior conservation efforts of those who might otherwise have slacked off after hearing that their neighbors used more energy than they did (**Figure 8.6**). Used wisely, information about norms can be a powerful tool to promote energy conservation: Giving consumers information about norms reduces energy consumption by the same amount as does raising the price of energy by 10–20 percent. Normative information like this can be even more effective in helping to solve problems that require collective action—such as the climate crisis—when paired with “working together” messages that reference “joining in” or “doing it together” (Howe, Carr, & Walton, 2021).

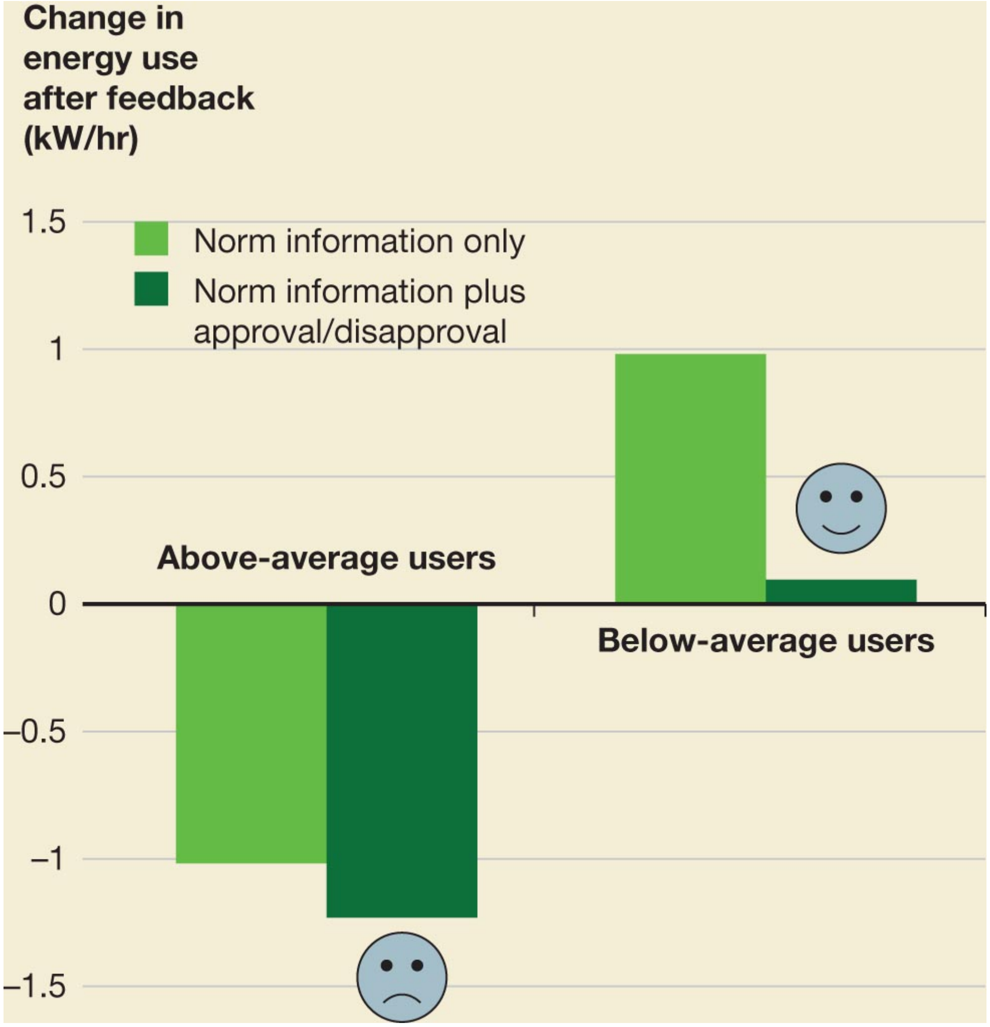
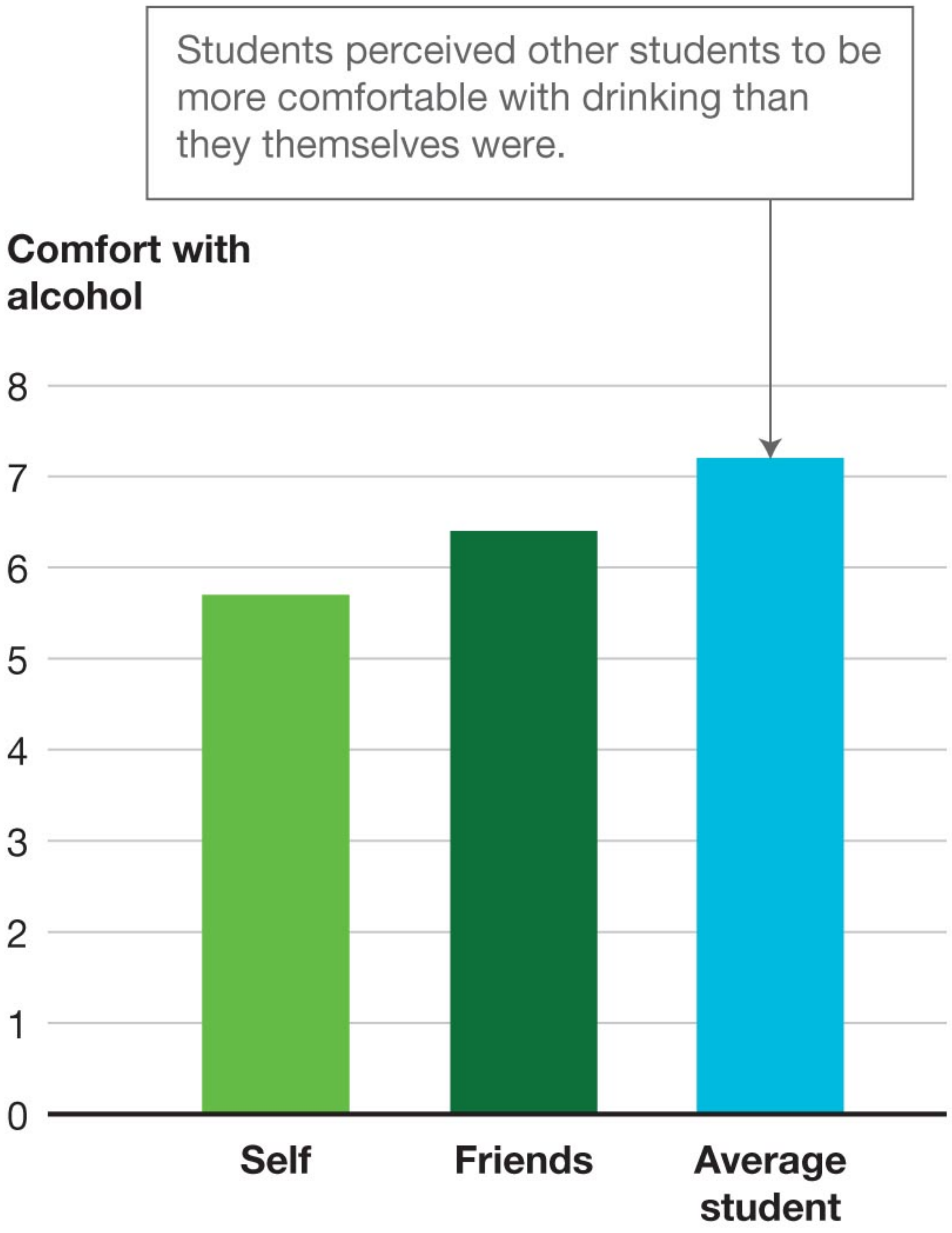


FIGURE 8.6 **USING NORMS TO CONSERVE ENERGY** In this study, telling above-average energy consumers how much energy they used compared with how much the average household used significantly reduced energy consumption (bars on the left). Providing this information to below-average energy consumers led to significantly greater energy consumption unless it was accompanied by a simple symbol of approval (bars on the right). Source: Adapted from Schultz et al., 2007.

This simple technique of informing people about social norms is likely to be most effective when the information is surprising (when people have misunderstood the norm), such as when people overestimate the popularity of destructive behavior or underestimate the popularity of constructive behavior (Tankard & Paluck, 2016). Student drinking is a case in point. On campuses across the United States, students think that binge drinking is much more common than it actually is and that “teetotaling” or moderate drinking is much less common than it really is (Perkins, Haines, & Rice, 2005). These beliefs represent examples of pluralistic ignorance, or the tendency for people to act in ways that conflict with their true beliefs or preferences because they think they are not widely shared by others. But when many people do so, it makes everyone even more convinced that the erroneous group norm exists.

In one study of pluralistic ignorance on a college campus, Deborah Prentice and Dale Miller (1993) examined the discrepancy between private attitudes and public norms about alcohol use at Princeton University. Prentice and Miller asked Princeton undergraduates how comfortable they felt about campus drinking habits as well as how comfortable with drinking they thought both their friends and the average undergraduate were. If the students were suffering from pluralistic ignorance, they would indicate that they were less at ease with drinking than they supposed most students were.

(A)



(B)

FIGURE 8.7 **PLURALISTIC IGNORANCE** (A) University students believe drinking alcohol is more popular among their peers than it really is. Because of this belief, they censor their own reservations about drinking, thus furthering the illusion that alcohol is so popular. (B) These results show student ratings of their own and others' comfort with

campus drinking habits at Princeton University. Source: Part B adapted from Prentice & Miller, 1993.

The results, shown in **Figure 8.7**, indicate that this is exactly what happened. Hidden discomfort with alcohol existed side by side with perceived popular support.

Prentice and Miller attributed this discrepancy to the visibility of drinking on campus:

> The alcohol situation at Princeton is exacerbated by the central role of alcohol in many of the university’s institutions and traditions. For example, at the eating clubs, the center of social life on campus, alcohol is on tap 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Princeton reunions boast the second highest level of alcohol consumption for any event in the country after the Indianapolis 500. The social norms for drinking at the university are clear: Students must be comfortable with alcohol use to partake of Princeton social life. (Prentice & Miller, 1993, p. 244)

Efforts to stem excessive alcohol consumption by providing students with accurate information about their peers’ drinking habits have proved to be quite effective (Neighbors, Larimer, & Lewis, 2004; Perkins & Craig, 2006; Schroeder & Prentice, 1998). In one study, students attending regularly scheduled club or organizational meetings electronically submitted information about their own drinking behavior and their beliefs about the drinking habits of their peers (LaBrie et al., 2008). Their aggregate responses were immediately projected for all to see, giving everyone information about actual drinking behavior on campus—and correcting widespread misunderstandings of how much and how often other students drink. In follow-up surveys conducted one and two months later, the students who received this information reported drinking significantly less than they had previously and less than students in a control group.

Similar norm-based approaches have been used to combat harassment and bullying in schools (Paluck & Shepherd, 2012; Shepherd & Paluck, 2015). In one study, half of a group of 56 middle schools in New Jersey were randomly assigned to a social norm treatment condition in which a randomly selected group of students was asked to express opposition to the kinds of conflict and harassment that were common at their school (for example, speaking out when one student taunted or viciously teased another). The other schools served as controls. Disciplinary reports declined in the treatment schools by 30 percent relative to the control schools. As you might expect, some students were more effective than others at modeling anti-harassment norms: The more popular students had a bigger effect on their peers' beliefs about what sorts of conflicts were common or acceptable at their school (Paluck, Shepherd, & Aronow, 2016).

STATIC AND DYNAMIC NORMS What can you do when the relevant norm is counter to the behavior you would like to see? What if students at a given school are just fine with bullying, or what if students at a notorious "party school" favor quite a bit of drinking? How can norms be used to bring about desired change in environments like that? One solution is to highlight that the norms are changing—that, sure, only a third of the population favors a given action or policy right now, but that's an increase over the one in five who favored it only recently. In one study that supports this idea, male survey respondents in a *static norm* condition were told that over 35 percent of men in the United States consider themselves feminists. Those in the *dynamic norm* condition were told that "the number of men who consider themselves feminists is increasing. . . . Now over 35% of men consider themselves feminists." Afterward, those in the latter condition were more likely to indicate that they identified as feminists and that they supported pay equity policies (Sparkman & Walton, 2019; see also Mortensen et al., 2019). People are influenced not just by the numbers—that is, by what the norm *is*. They are also influenced by trends—by how the norm *is changing*.

DESCRIPTIVE AND PRESCRIPTIVE NORMS In preparing norm-based compliance appeals, it's important to be aware that there are two kinds of norms. Descriptive norms are simply descriptions of what is typically done in a given context. Prescriptive norms, often called *injunctive norms*, are what one is supposed to do. Descriptive norms correspond to what *is*; prescriptive norms correspond to what *ought to be*. University administrators often say that students should get 8–9 hours of sleep each night (prescriptive norm), but most students sleep much less (descriptive norm).

To increase compliance, the two norms should not be placed in conflict with each other. A common mistake is to try to strengthen the pull of the prescriptive norm by stating how infrequently it is followed. "Isn't it a shame that so few people . . ." vote in elections, eat a healthy diet, get screened for cancer—you name it. Making such an appeal seems sensible, but note that it highlights the unfortunate reality—the descriptive norm—as much as or more than the prescriptive norm you want to promote (Sieverding, Decker, & Zimmermann, 2010; Stok et al., 2014). By saying what a shame it is that so few people vote, you're pointing out that few people vote. Given the power of descriptive norms, such information can actually make people *less* likely, not more likely, to vote. Indeed, those involved in get-out-the-vote campaigns now realize, thanks to research by social psychologists, that it's more effective to emphasize how many people vote, not how few (Gerber & Rogers, 2009).

Collecting
Petrified Wood
Prohibited

DESCRIPTIVE AND PRESCRIPTIVE NORMS IN CONFLICT By telling people they shouldn’t remove petrified wood from the Petrified Forest National Park (prescriptive norm), park officials are communicating that stealing wood is something people do (descriptive norm). This can increase the very action—theft—that authorities want to prevent.

Researchers conducted an ingenious investigation of this approach in the Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona, where visitors sometimes take samples of petrified wood home with them as souvenirs (Cialdini et al., 2006). If everyone took samples, of course, there would soon be no Petrified Forest to visit. To figure out the most effective way to deal with this problem, the investigators rotated different warning signs at various locations in the park. One sign included the usual emphasis on the severity of the problem, stating, “Many past visitors have removed petrified wood from the park, changing the state of the Petrified Forest,” accompanied by photographs of visitors taking wood. An alternative sign was framed positively: “The vast majority of past visitors have left the petrified wood in the park, preserving the natural state of the Petrified Forest,” with accompanying pictures of visitors admiring and photographing a piece of petrified wood. The investigators placed specially marked pieces of wood along trails near these signs and monitored how many of them were stolen over the course of the experiment. In a remarkable demonstration of the importance of aligning prescriptive and descriptive norms, the theft rate was over four times lower when the signs emphasized how *few* people take wood from the park.

NORM OF RECIPROCITY When someone does something for us, we usually feel compelled to do something in return. Indeed, all societies that have ever been studied possess a powerful norm of reciprocity, according to which people are expected to provide benefits for those who have provided benefits for them (Fiske, 1991; Gouldner, 1960). This norm also exists in many bird and mammal species. When one monkey removes parasites from another’s back, the latter typically returns the favor, thus helping cement the social bond between them.

> “All contacts among men rest on the schema of giving and returning the equivalent.”
>
> —GEORG SIMMEL, GERMAN SOCIOLOGIST

> “There is no duty more indispensable than that of returning a kindness.”
>
> —CICERO

This powerful norm can be a highly effective tool to elicit compliance. If you do something nice for someone, that person will be more likely agree to a reasonable request you subsequently make. By failing to respond favorably, the person would violate a powerful social norm and run the risk of being viewed negatively (Cotterell, Eisenberger, & Speicher, 1992). Indeed, the English language is rich in derogatory terms for those who don't uphold their end of the bargain: *sponge*, *freeloader*, *moocher*, *bum*, *deadbeat*, *ingrate*, *parasite*, *bloodsucker*, *leech*. Who wants to be seen in any of these ways? This may be why restaurant customers often leave larger tips when the server gives them a piece of candy with the check (Strohmetz et al., 2002).

RECIPROCITY AND GROOMING AMONG MAMMALS Reciprocity helps promote group living and reduce aggression, as evidenced by grooming in macaques. They abide by the rule "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." Macaque A is more likely to groom macaque B than to groom a random other macaque if macaque B has previously groomed macaque A.

The influence of the norm of reciprocity in getting others to comply was demonstrated in a simple experiment in which two people were asked to rate a number of paintings, supposedly as part of a study of aesthetics (D. T. Regan, 1971; see also Burger et al., 2009; Whatley et al., 1999). One was a real participant, and the other was a confederate of the experimenter. In one condition, the confederate returned from a break with two sodas and offered one to the participant: “I asked (the experimenter) if I could get myself a Coke, and he said it was OK, so I bought one for you, too.” In another condition, the confederate returned empty-handed. Later, the confederate asked the participant for a favor. He explained that he was selling raffle tickets; the prize was a new car, and he’d win $50 if he sold the most tickets. He then proceeded to ask if the participant was willing to buy any tickets for 25 cents apiece: “Any would help, the more the better.” (To make sure all participants had the means to purchase some tickets, they had already been paid—in quarters—for participating in the study.)

In a testament to the power of the norm of reciprocity, participants who earlier had been given a soda by the confederate bought twice as many raffle tickets as those who had not (or those who had been given a soda by the experimenter, to control for the possibility that simply receiving a soda, and perhaps being in a good mood as a result, is what had increased compliance).

Thus, doing a favor for someone creates an uninvited debt that the recipient is obligated to repay. Businesses and other organizations often try to take advantage of this pressure by preceding a request with a small gift. Insurance agents give out calendars or return-address labels. Marketers who want people to complete a survey send it out along with a dollar. Cult members offer a pamphlet, book, or flower before giving their pitch. Sometimes our hearts sink when we see these gifts coming, and we often go to great lengths to avoid them because we recognize the obligations they bring.

THE RECIPROCAL CONCESSIONS (DOOR-IN-THE-FACE) TECHNIQUE Robert Cialdini, social psychology’s most innovative contributor to the literature on compliance, has explored a novel application of the norm of reciprocity. The inspiration for his research on the subject is best introduced in his own words:

> I was walking down the street when I was approached by an eleven- or twelve-year-old boy. He introduced himself and said that he was selling tickets to the annual Boy Scouts circus to be held on the upcoming Saturday night. He asked if I wished to buy any at five dollars apiece. Since one of the last places I wanted to spend Saturday evening was with the Boy Scouts, I declined. “Well,” he said, “if you don’t want to buy any tickets, how about buying some of our big chocolate bars? They’re only a dollar each.” I bought a couple and, right away, realized that something noteworthy had happened. I knew that to be the case because: (a) I do not like chocolate bars; (b) I do like dollars; (c) I was standing there with two of his chocolate bars; and (d) he was walking away with two of my dollars. (Cialdini, 1984, p. 47)

Cialdini’s experience with the Boy Scout led him to articulate a general compliance technique whereby people feel compelled to respond to a concession by making a concession themselves (Cialdini et al., 1975; Feeley, Anker, & Aloe, 2012; Genschow et al., 2021; O’Keefe & Hale, 1998, 2001; Reeves et al., 1991). First, you ask someone for a very large favor that will certainly be refused, and then you follow up with a request for a more modest favor that you are really interested in receiving. The idea is that the drop in the size of your request will be seen as a concession; the person being asked will feel compelled to match your concession in order to honor the norm of reciprocity. The most available concession the person can make is to comply with your second request.

Another way of looking at this reciprocal concessions technique is that the first favor is so large and unreasonable that the target inevitably refuses, slamming the door in the face of that request but keeping it open just a crack for the subsequent, smaller request to get through. Accordingly, it’s also known as the *door-in-the-face technique*.

Cialdini demonstrated the power of this technique in a field study in which members of his research team posed as representatives of the “County Youth Counseling Program” and approached students around campus. They asked individual students if they would be willing to chaperone a group of juvenile delinquents on a trip to the zoo. Not surprisingly, the overwhelming majority, 83 percent, refused. But the response rate was much different for a second group of students who had first encountered a much larger request. They were first asked whether they would be willing to counsel juvenile delinquents for 2 hours a week for the next two years! Not surprisingly, all of them refused, at which point they were asked about chaperoning the trip to the zoo. Fifty percent of these students agreed to chaperone—triple the rate of the other group (Cialdini et al., 1975). A series of carefully crafted follow-up studies revealed that the pressure participants felt to comply with what was perceived as a concession (chaperone one trip to the zoo rather than provide counsel for the next two years) was responsible for their dramatic increase in compliance. Accordingly, this technique doesn’t work when the two requests are made by different individuals. In that case, the second, smaller request is seen not as a concession but as an entirely separate request by a different person, so the person being asked doesn’t feel the same obligation.

Seizing, or Creating, the Right Mood

Suppose you want to ask your dad for a new computer, a new amplifier for your guitar, or simply to borrow the family car for a road trip. When would you ask? When he’s just come home from work in a foul mood, cursing his boss and his suffocating job? Or after he’s just landed a promotion and a big raise? It doesn’t take an advanced degree in psychology to know that it’s better to request a favor when a person is in a good mood (Andrade & Ho, 2007). A positive mood makes people feel expansive and charitable, so they’re more likely to agree to reasonable requests. Even little children know to wait until mom or dad is in a good mood before asking for a favor of some kind.

The wisdom of this approach has been verified in countless experiments. In one study, participants received a telephone call from someone who claimed to have spent her last dime on this very (“misdialed”) call. (This study was run before cell phones, when people often went to phone booths and paid a dime to make a local call. You may have seen someone do this in the movies!) The caller asked if the participant would dial a specified number and relay a message (Isen, Clark, & Schwartz, 1976). In one condition, shortly before receiving the call, participants were given a free sample of stationery to put them in a positive mood. In another condition, participants did not receive a free sample before the call. When the request was made of those who had not received the free sample, only 10 percent complied. But the compliance rate shot up dramatically among participants who received the request a few minutes after receiving the gift. The compliance rate then declined gradually as the delay between receiving the gift and hearing the request increased (**Figure 8.8**).

PENCILS OF PROMISE

POSITIVE MOOD AND REQUESTS When people are in a good mood, they are more likely to agree to requests. Those attending this benefit for the charitable organization Pencils of Promise (and getting to shake Usher’s hand) are therefore more likely to donate money to support the charity’s efforts to build schools and expand educational opportunities around the globe.

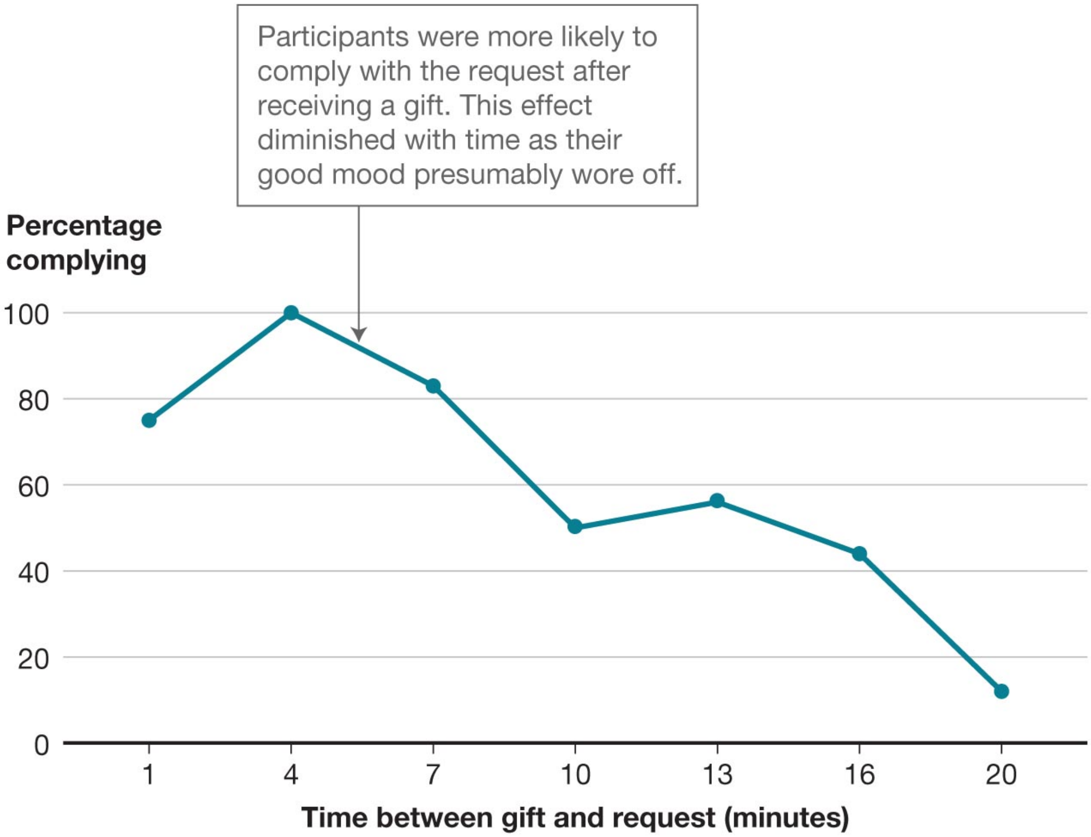


FIGURE 8.8 **POSITIVE MOOD AND COMPLIANCE** In this study, being in a good mood boosted participant compliance, with the effect slowly wearing off with the passage of time. Source: Adapted from Isen et al., 1976.

A positive mood tends to increase compliance for two main reasons. First, our mood colors how we interpret events. We’re more likely to view requests for favors as less intrusive and less threatening when we’re in a good mood, and we’re more inclined to give others the benefit of the doubt. For instance, when you’re in a good mood, you’re more likely to consider someone who asks to borrow your class notes to be a victim of circumstance who could get back on track with a little help rather than an irresponsible or lazy person who doesn’t deserve to be bailed out (Carlson, Charlin, & Miller, 1988; Forgas, 1998a, 1998b; Forgas & Bower, 1987).

The second reason a positive mood tends to increase compliance involves what’s known as mood maintenance. Pardon the tautology, but it feels good to feel good, and we typically want that feeling to last as long as possible (Clark & Isen, 1982; Wegener & Petty, 1994). One way to sustain a good mood is to do something for another person (Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2008). Stated differently, one way to wreck a good mood is to turn down a request for a favor and invite all sorts of self-recrimination: “What kind of heartless person am I?”

Several studies have shown that wanting to maintain a good mood is an important component of a positive mood’s effect on compliance. In one experiment, some participants were first given cookies, which put them in a good mood, while other participants weren’t given cookies. All of them were then asked (by someone other than the person who provided the cookies) if they’d be willing to assist with an experiment by serving as a confederate. Half the participants were told that the job of confederate would involve *helping* the “true” participant in the experiment, and the other half were told that it would involve *hindering* the participant. Having received a cookie (and being in a good mood) increased the compliance rate when the task involved helping the participant—but not when it involved hindering the participant. Helping another person promotes feeling good; hurting someone doesn’t. Thus, while being in a good mood increases compliance, it does not do so when the act of compliance would undermine that good mood.

NEGATIVE STATE RELIEF Oskar Schindler (in the center) saved the lives of 1,200 Polish Jews during the Holocaust. Initially seeking easy profits, he took over a Jewish factory and ran it with cheap Jewish labor. Perhaps in a desire for negative state relief or from sheer humanitarianism, he used the millions he made from the cheap labor to bribe officials to save people who were slated for death. He is pictured here in Tel Aviv with some of those he saved and their descendants.

NEGATIVE MOOD If a good mood increases compliance, does a bad mood decrease it? It surely can (your dad is less likely to lend you the family car when he’s mad at his boss), but even the slightest introspection reveals that certain types of bad moods are actually likely to *increase* compliance, not decrease it. Some people know this and use it to their advantage. Suppose, for example, that you catch the person you’re dating flirting with a classmate of yours, and you point out the offense. Would that be a good time to ask for something? You bet it would! When people feel guilty, they're often motivated to do whatever they can to get rid of that awful feeling. And as we have seen, doing something for someone else makes us feel good and elevates our mood. So at least one type of bad mood, centered around guilt, should increase compliance.

Social psychologists have demonstrated a strong positive association between guilt and compliance in many experiments. Participants have been made to feel guilty by being induced to lie, tricked into thinking they've broken a camera, or maneuvered into knocking over stacks of carefully arranged index cards—all of which led to increased compliance (Carlsmith & Gross, 1969; Darlington & Macker, 1966; O'Keefe & Figgé, 1997; D. T. Regan, Williams, & Sparling, 1972).

Other types of bad moods, not just those produced by guilt, can also increase compliance. In one study, watching an adorable lab rat get "accidentally" jolted with an intense shock led participants to donate more money to charity than did those who hadn't seen the unfortunate event (J. W. Regan, 1971). And, in general, it seems that bad moods sometimes increase compliance in part because we simply don't want to feel bad. Helping others makes us feel better, so we jump at the chance to brighten our mood. This is the negative state relief hypothesis in action. According to this hypothesis, taking an action to benefit someone else, especially when it's for a good cause, is one way to make ourselves feel better (Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973; Cialdini & Fultz, 1990; Cialdini et al., 1987). We often help others, in other words, to help ourselves.

A final word about the impact of moods, good and bad, on compliance: Investigators in Israel found that if parole judges had just finished a meal before hearing a prisoner's plea for release from prison, there was a two-thirds chance they would vote for parole (Danziger, Levav, & Avnaim-Pesso, 2011). Cases that came up just before lunch, however, when the judges were hungry and presumably crankier, had precisely a zero chance for parole. A full stomach makes a difference, so hit your dad up for the car keys after dinner, not before.

LOOKING BACK

A variety of techniques can be used to increase the chances that a person will agree to a request. The foot-in-the-door technique, whereby people who comply with a small initial request are more likely to agree to a larger request later on, takes advantage of people’s desire for consistency and their commitment to a personal identity. Norm-based approaches capitalize on people’s tendencies to look to others for guidance. People are responsive to both descriptive and prescriptive norms, but it is important that norm-based appeals do not pit the two against each other. An especially powerful norm is the norm of reciprocity, which compels people to benefit those who have benefited them. In the reciprocal concessions (door-in-the-face) technique, people who have refused a large request are then induced to agree to a smaller request. People who are in a positive mood are more likely to comply with a request in order to maintain their good mood. In contrast, according to the negative state relief hypothesis, people who feel guilty or sad are also likely to comply with a request in order to feel better.

Glossary

foot-in-the-door technique

A compliance approach that involves making an initial small request with which nearly everyone complies, followed by a larger request involving the real behavior of interest.

pluralistic ignorance

A phenomenon whereby people act in ways that conflict with their true attitudes or beliefs because they believe others don’t share them. When a great many people do so, their behavior reinforces the erroneous group norm.

descriptive norm

The behavior exhibited by most people in a given context.

prescriptive norm

The way a person is supposed to behave in a given context; also called *injunctive norm*.

norm of reciprocity

A norm dictating that people should provide benefits to those who benefit them.

reciprocal concessions technique

A compliance approach that involves asking someone for a very large favor that will certainly be refused and then following that request with one for a smaller favor (which tends to be seen as a concession the target feels compelled to honor).

negative state relief hypothesis

The idea that people engage in certain actions, such as agreeing to a request, to relieve their negative feelings and feel better about themselves.

Obedience to Authority

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe the early psychological studies on obedience and summarize what the results of those experiments tell us.
- Explain when people are likely to obey the demands of people in authority and when they are more likely to withstand the pressure to obey.

The study of when and why people obey the commands or instructions of someone in authority has been dominated by the most famous set of social psychology experiments ever conducted—those of Stanley Milgram (previously discussed in Chapters 1 and 4). Milgram's experiments are so well-known, in fact, that the social psychologist Lee Ross said that they "have become part of our society's shared intellectual legacy—that small body of historical incidents, biblical parables, and classic literature that serious thinkers feel free to draw on when they debate about human nature or contemplate human history" (L. Ross, 1988, p. 101).

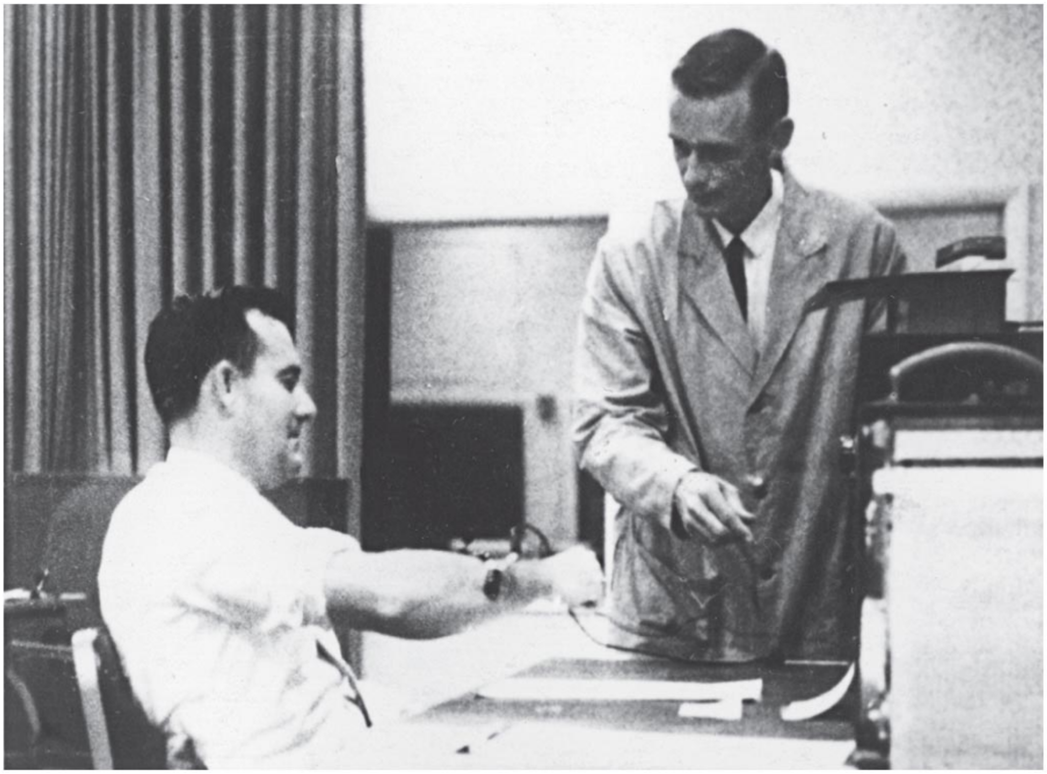
The Setup of the Milgram Experiments

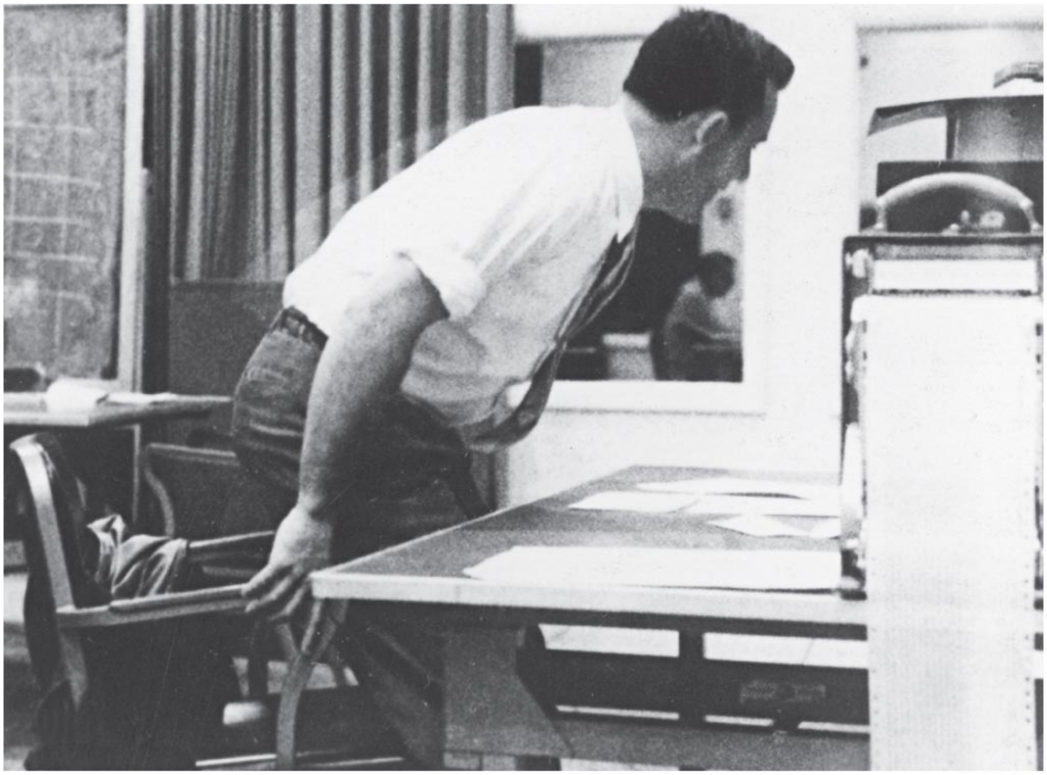
Milgram's research on obedience began as an investigation of conformity. Milgram was interested in whether the kinds of pressures observed in Asch's conformity experiment were powerful enough to lead people to do something far more significant than report an incorrect line length. He wondered what would happen if he asked participants to deliver electric shocks whenever a subject performing a task responded incorrectly. In reality, the “subject” was the experimenter’s confederate. Would participants conform to the example set by other obedient participants, even when doing so involved hurting another human being?

This is an interesting question, but Milgram never pursued it. The reason is that he first needed to obtain data from a control group to determine participants’ willingness to deliver electric shocks in the first place, when there was no one to model compliance (Evans, 1980). And that’s when he got his surprising result—one that radically changed his research agenda. A large percentage of participants were willing to do something they thought was hurting another person, even when there was no group of other participants leading the way.

Recall from Chapter 1 the basic procedure of Milgram’s experiments. After responding to a newspaper ad, participants showed up for an experiment on learning. The setup was rigged so that the participant was always assigned to the role of the “teacher” and the confederate to the role of the “learner.” The teacher’s job was to administer an electric shock every time the learner—a genial, middle-aged man who was strapped into a chair with his arm attached to a fake shock generator—made a mistake by reporting the wrong word from a list of word pairs (such as *glove/book*, *grill/detergent*, *anvil/pope*). Teachers were briefly strapped to the chair themselves and given a 45-volt shock so they would know the shocks were painful. The teacher started off by delivering 15 volts after the learner’s first mistake. With each subsequent mistake, the teacher had to increase the shock by 15 volts. As the mistakes accumulated, participants found themselves required to deliver 255, 300, and 330 volts of electricity—all the way up to 450 volts. (In reality, no electric shock was delivered to the learner.) If a participant expressed reservations or tried to terminate the experiment, the experimenter would respond with a carefully scripted set of responses: “Please continue,” “The experiment requires that you continue,” “It is absolutely essential that you continue,” and “You have no other choice; you must go on.”

The great surprise in these studies was how many participants continued to obey the experimenter’s orders and deliver the maximum level of shock to the confederate. In the *remote-feedback version* of the experiment, in which the learner was in an adjoining room and could not be heard except when he vigorously pounded on the wall after a shock of 300 volts, 66 percent of the participants continued the learning experiment and delivered the maximum shock of 450 volts. In the *voice-feedback version*, the participants could hear the learner’s increasingly desperate pleas—including screaming that he had a heart condition—until finally, and ominously, he became silent. Despite the many cues that the learner was suffering, 62.5 percent of the participants delivered the maximum shock (Milgram, 1965, 1974).


(A)



(B)

THE MILGRAM EXPERIMENT Participants were led to believe that the shock generator had 30 levels of shock, ranging from “slight shock” to “danger: severe shock” to “XXX.” (A) A participant being given a sample shock of 45 volts (this was the only real shock in the experiment). (B) A participant standing up to ask the experimenter if he could stop the experiment.

Opposing Forces

Milgram’s participants were caught in an agonizing conflict. On the one hand were forces compelling them to complete the experiment and continue delivering shocks (Reeder, Monroe, & Pryor, 2008). Among these forces was a sense of fair play: They had agreed to serve as participants, they had already received payment for doing so, and they felt they now had to fulfill their part of the bargain. Some were probably also motivated by the reason they had agreed to participate in the first place: to advance science and the understanding of human behavior. Normative social influence was also likely at play—in this case, the desire to avoid the disapproval of the experimenter or anyone else associated with the study. Closely related to this concern was the very human desire to avoid “making a scene” and upsetting others (Goffman, 1966; R. S. Miller, 1996).

On the other hand, several powerful forces compelled participants to want to terminate the experiment. Foremost among these was the moral imperative to stop the suffering of the learner (Burger, Girgis, & Manning, 2011). Participants may have felt a specific desire not to hurt the genial man they had met earlier as well as a more abstract reluctance to hurt others. Some were also probably concerned about what would happen if something went wrong. “What if he dies or is permanently injured?” “Will there be a lawsuit?” Still others may have wondered about the prospect of having to walk out with the learner after everything was over and the resulting embarrassment they might feel or possible retaliation from the learner.

Understanding these opposing forces leads to a better understanding of why participants responded the way they did and why the whole experience was so stressful. How might the rate of obedience change if the strength of these opposing forces were modified (Blass, 2000, 2004; A. G. Miller, 1986)? Milgram tried to answer this question through a comprehensive series of studies in which he conducted informative variations on his original experiments (see A Closer Look on p. 281).

Would You Have Obeyed?

Nobody anticipated the widespread levels of obedience Milgram observed. A group of psychiatrists predicted that fewer than 1 percent of all participants—a pathological fringe—would continue until they delivered the maximum amount of shock. This failure of prediction is matched by an equally noteworthy failure of after-the-fact insight: The vast majority of people believe, even after hearing the basic results and all the study variations, that they themselves would never deliver very high levels of shock. Thus, although Milgram’s experimental variations shed light on when and why people engage in such surprising behavior, they don’t provide a fully satisfying explanation, or else we would be more likely to accept that we ourselves might obey in the same situation. As Lee Ross put it, the experiments do not pass a critical “empathy test” (L. Ross, 1988). They don’t lead us to empathize fully with the obedient participants and take seriously the possibility that we would also obey to the end—as most participants did. A truly satisfying explanation might not convince us that we would *surely* obey, but it should at least convince us that we *might* act that way.

Milgram’s work is often mentioned in discussions of how people sometimes obey the directives of malevolent government officials and engage in sadistic torture or commit hideous crimes against humanity, such as those witnessed during the Holocaust in Nazi Germany and more recent massacres in Bosnia, Cambodia, Rwanda, and Darfur. Explanations of such incomprehensible cruelties vary along an “exceptionalist-normalist” continuum. The exceptionalist thesis is that such crimes are perpetrated only by “exceptional” people—that is, exceptionally sadistic, desperate, or ethnocentric people. Many Germans were virulent anti-Semites. The Serbs harbored long-standing hatred and resentment against the Bosnians. The Rwandan Hutus had a score to settle with the Tutsis. The normalist thesis, in contrast, is that most people are capable of such destructive obedience, and given the right circumstances, almost anyone would commit such acts.

Milgram’s research, of course, is typically taken to support the normalist view. Milgram himself certainly took this position. In 1979, on the CBS TV show *60 Minutes*, journalist

Morley Safer asked Milgram whether he thought something like the Holocaust could happen in the United States. Milgram offered this opinion:

> I would say, on the basis of having observed a thousand people in the experiment and having my own intuition shaped and informed by these experiments, that if a system of death camps were set up in the United States of the sort we had seen in Nazi Germany, one would be able to find sufficient personnel for those camps in any medium sized American town. (Quoted in Blass, 1999, p. 955)

Let’s take a closer look.

THEY TRIED BUT FAILED One reason people think they would never behave like the average participant in Milgram’s studies is that they misunderstand exactly how the average participant behaved (L. Ross, 1988). People conjure up images of participants casually going along with the experimenter’s commands, increasing the shock level from trial to trial, and being relatively inattentive to the learner’s situation. Indeed, Milgram’s experiments have often been described as demonstrations of “blind” obedience.

But that’s not what happened. Participants didn’t blindly obey. Nearly all tried to disobey in one form or another, but they weren’t particularly good at it. Nearly everyone called the experimenter’s attention to the learner’s suffering in an implicit plea to stop the proceedings. Many stated explicitly that they refused to continue (but nonetheless went on with the experiment). Some got out of their chair in defiance, only to sit back down moments later. As Ross pointed out, “the Milgram experiments have less to say about ‘destructive obedience’ than about ineffective and indecisive *disobedience*” (L. Ross, 1988, p. 103).

This distinction is critical. Most of us have had the experience of having good intentions but not being able to translate those intentions into effective action. For instance, maybe you’ve *wanted* to speak up more forcefully and effectively against racist, sexist, or homophobic remarks, but you were too slow to respond or the words didn’t come out as forthrightly as you intended (Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2001). Or maybe you’ve *wanted* to reach out to someone who was being ignored at a party, but you were distracted by your own social needs. Most of us can relate to being good-hearted but ineffective, but most of us can’t relate to being uncaring.

A chilling parallel to the behavior of Milgram’s participants is the behavior of some of the German soldiers called on to execute Polish Jews during World War II (Browning, 1992). Members of German Reserve Police Battalion 101 were mostly men who hoped to avoid the inevitable violence of the war by volunteering for police duty in Hamburg. After the invasion of Poland, however, they were reassigned to serve as military police in occupied territory. Most of their duties consisted of routine police work. But on July 13, 1942, the men were roused from their barracks before dawn and taken to the outskirts of the village of Józéfow, where they were given gruesome orders: to round up all the Jewish men, women, and children from the village, send all able-bodied young men to a work camp, and shoot the rest.

Most were shocked and repelled by their orders. Many resisted. But their resistance, like that of Milgram’s participants, was feeble. Some kept busy with petty errands or moved to the back of the battalion, hoping to avoid being called on. Others took part in the roundup but then refrained from shooting if no one was watching. Still others fired but missed intentionally. What they *didn’t* do was state assertively that they wouldn’t participate or that what they were being asked to do was wrong. They tried to find an easy way to disobey, but there was no easy way—and so they obeyed. (Of course, many of the acts of genocide during the Holocaust were perpetrated by individuals who, unlike many of the soldiers in Reserve Police Battalion 101, fully embraced what they were doing.)

In the case of Milgram’s experiments, participants had trouble halting the proceedings partly because the experimenter wasn’t playing by the normal rules of social life. The participants offered reasons for stopping the experiments, but the experimenter largely ignored those reasons, making minimally responsive statements such as “The experiment requires that you continue.” Participants were confused and uncertain about how to act. As noted in the earlier discussion of conformity, people tend not to act decisively when they lack a solid grasp of the events happening around them. What should you do when told to deliver electric shocks to “teach” someone who’s no longer trying to learn anything, at the insistence of an authority figure who seems unconcerned about the learner’s predicament? How do you respond when events have stopped making sense?

These questions have important implications for those real-world instances of destructive obedience with which we should be most concerned. Many of the most hideous episodes of genocide, for example, have occurred right after large-scale social upheaval. Without reliable norms of appropriate behavior, people may lack the confidence necessary to take decisive action to stop such atrocities.

RELEASE FROM RESPONSIBILITY The inability of Milgram’s participants to stop the experiment meant they were trapped in a situation of terrible conflict and stress. Although they knew that what was happening should not continue, they didn’t know how to bring it to an end. They were therefore desperate for anything that would reduce their stress. Fortunately for the participants (but unfortunately for the learner, if he really had been receiving electric shock), the experimenter provided something to reduce their stress by taking responsibility for what was happening. When participants asked, as many did, “Who is responsible for what happens here?” the experimenter responded, “I am responsible.” Participants seized on this assertion as a justification for their actions, and the stress they were experiencing was significantly reduced.

Of course, the cover, or “out,” the experimenter provided worked only because participants viewed the person taking responsibility as a legitimate authority. People generally don’t let just anyone take responsibility and then assume that everything is okay. Suppose you’re approached by a strange character on campus who says, “Quick, help me set fire to the administration building; I’ll take full responsibility.” You certainly would refuse to pitch in. In Milgram’s experiments, however, participants believed they could legitimately transfer responsibility to the experimenter because he was a representative of science. In nearly all the variations, the experimenter was affiliated with Yale University, a respected institution (although obedience was still high when the experimenter operated out of a storefront in downtown Bridgeport, Connecticut). These aspects of the situation made it easier for participants to reduce their own stress over what was happening by assuming that the experimenter knew better and was ultimately responsible for what was happening.

The cover provided by authorities has implications for some of history’s worst acts of destructive obedience. Among Nazis in Germany, Hutus in Rwanda, and Boko Haram in Nigeria, demands to obey were issued by authority figures who either explicitly took responsibility for the group’s actions or whose position supported an assumption of responsibility. And such claims of responsibility have nearly always been bolstered by some overarching belief system. Whether based on nationalism, religious ideology, or ethnic identity, every example of organized aggression has been draped in a seemingly legitimizing ideology that seeks to present otherwise hideous actions in a way that makes them seem morally appropriate (Staub, 1989; Zajonc, 2002).

STEP-BY-STEP INVOLVEMENT It’s also important to remember that Milgram’s participants didn’t deliver 450 volts of electric shock right away. Instead, each participant first administered only 15 volts to the learner. Who wouldn’t do that? That’s feedback, not punishment. Then 30 volts. No problem there either. Then 45, 60, 75—each step a small one. Once participants started down this path, though, it was hard to stop, and they administered more and more shock. Indeed, the increments were so small that if a certain level of shock seemed like too much, why wouldn’t the previous level also have been too much (S. J. Gilbert, 1981)?

Mac Murray's
AUSTINS

(A)

(B)

LEGITIMIZING THE EXPERIMENT To see how participants would react if the experiment were not conducted at Yale and its authority seemed less legitimate, Milgram had them report to (A) a fictitious business called Research Associates of Bridgeport, located above a storefront in downtown Bridgeport, and (B) a seedy office. Obedience rates declined somewhat but remained high even under these conditions.

The step-by-step nature of participants’ obedience is a powerful reason why so many administered as much electric shock as they did. Most of us have had the experience of gradually getting in over our heads in this way. We may tell a “little white lie”—but one that sets in motion a cascade of events that requires more and more deception. (Many a TV sitcom plot rests on this very sequence.) Our behavior often creates its own momentum, and it’s hard to know in advance where that behavior will lead. Milgram’s participants can certainly be forgiven for not foreseeing how everything would unfold. Would any of us have seen it any more clearly?

The parallels between this element of Milgram’s procedure and what happened in Nazi Germany are striking. German citizens weren’t asked, when the Nazis first seized power, to assist with or condone the deportation of Jews, Roma, gay people, and communists to the death camps. Instead, the rights of these groups were gradually stripped away. Certain business practices were restricted, then travel constraints were imposed, and then citizenship was narrowed; only later were people loaded into boxcars and sent to the death camps. Of course, the step-by-step process in Nazi Germany is no excuse for the atrocities committed, but the Nazis would doubtless have had a much harder time getting so many people to comply if they had started with the last step.

> “It is easier to resist at the beginning than at the end.”
>
> —LEONARDO DA VINCI

Would Milgram Get the Same Results Today?

Milgram’s studies were done in the early 1960s. But that was then; this is now. If you conducted Milgram’s experiments today, would you get the same results? Some argue that today’s more intense media coverage of such events as domestic spying by the U.S. National Security Agency, the influence of powerful lobbyists on elected officials, and constant cries of “fake news” by former president Trump and his supporters have made people less trusting of authority and thus less likely to obey instructions to harm another individual. Perhaps, but that's a difficult idea to test because ethical concerns make it impossible to replicate Milgram's experiments today. All psychological research must now be approved by an institutional review board (IRB) whose responsibility is to make sure any proposed research wouldn't cause undue stress to the participants or harm them in any way (see Chapter 2). Few, if any, IRBs would approve a direct replication of Milgram's experiments.

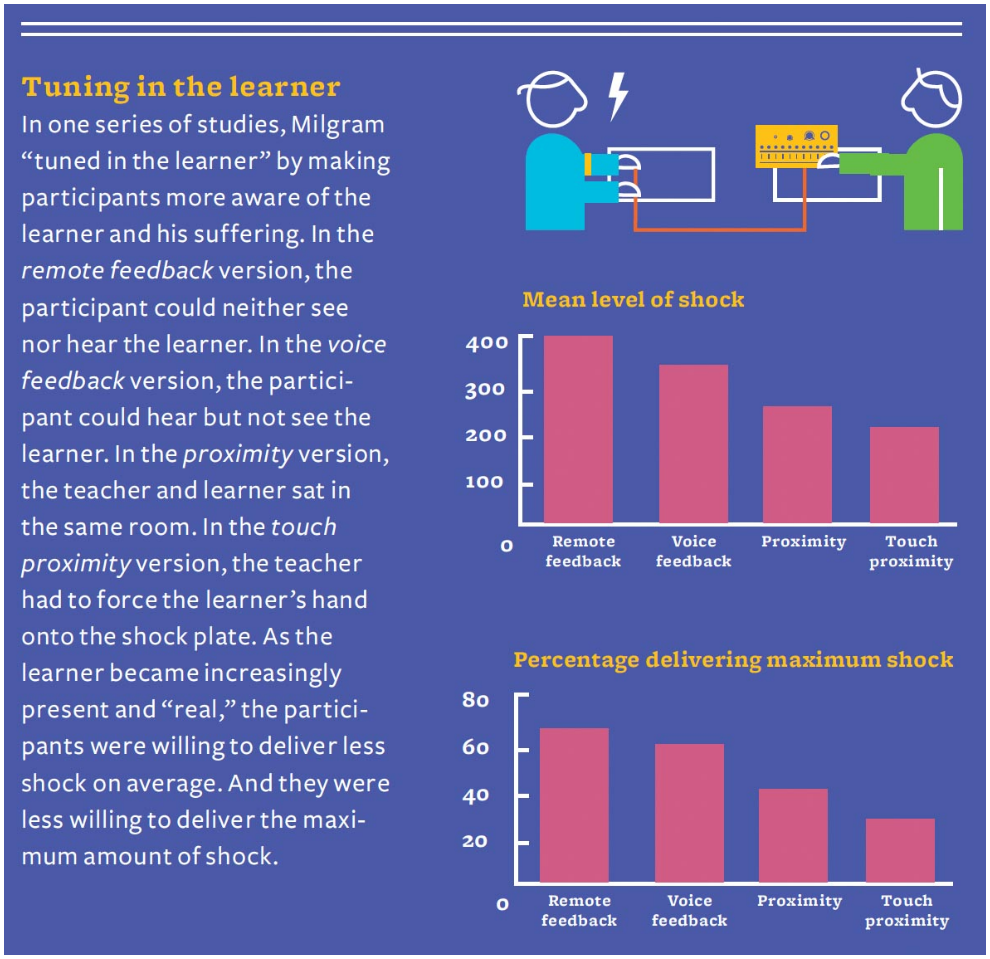
Jerry Burger, however, did the next best thing by conducting a near-replication of Milgram's basic experiment to investigate whether people's tendency to obey authority has changed since Milgram's time (Burger, 2009; Burger, Girgis, & Manning, 2011). Burger identified a critical moment in the original proceedings when disobedience was most likely: right after the participant had (supposedly) delivered 150 volts of electric shock and the learner protested and demanded to be released. It was something of a now-or-never moment: Four out of five of Milgram's participants who didn't stop at this point never stopped at all.

Burger saw an opportunity. It would be ethically unacceptable to put people through the stress of deciding between disobeying the experimenter and administering 300 or 400 volts of electricity. But the procedure isn't so stressful—and is thus more ethically acceptable—up to the 150-volt level. Until that point, Milgram's learner hadn't protested, so the pain caused by the shocks (the participants would presume) couldn't be that bad. Burger therefore sought and received permission from the IRB at his university to replicate Milgram's basic experiment up to that point only.

A CLOSER LOOK

Opposing Forces in the Milgram Experiments

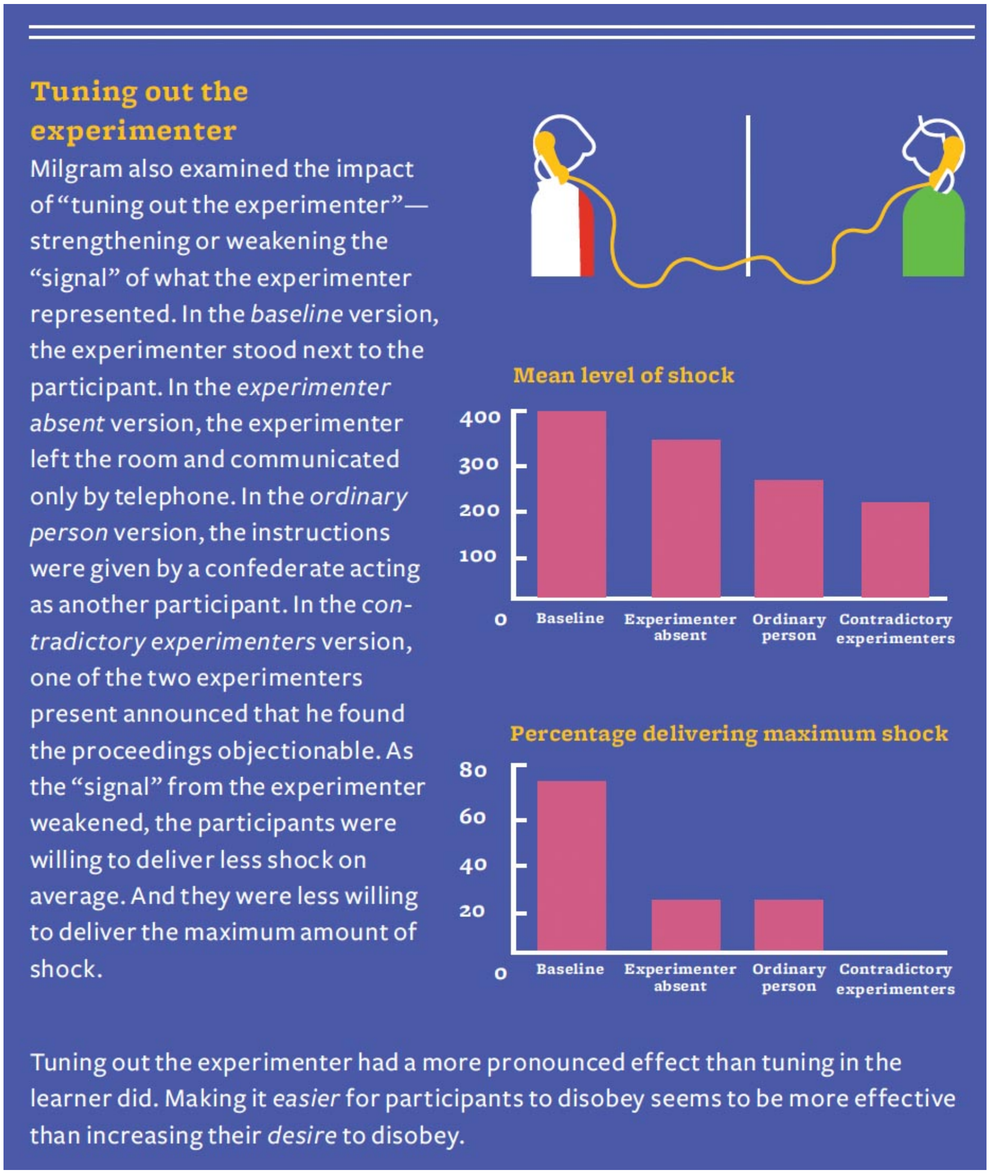
Milgram knew that many of his participants were experiencing tremendous conflict. On the one hand, they were worried about the learner, but on the other hand, they felt compelled to obey because they didn’t want to disappoint the experimenter, obstruct his scientific inquiry, or create a scene. In a series of variations on his main paradigm, Milgram altered elements of the experimental setup to examine the impact of intensifying or reducing these two opposing forces.



Tuning in the learner

In one series of studies, Milgram “tuned in the learner” by making participants more aware of the learner and his suffering. In the *remote feedback* version, the participant could neither see nor hear the learner. In the *voice feedback* version, the participant could hear but not see the learner. In the *proximity* version, the teacher and learner sat in the same room. In the *touch proximity* version, the teacher had to force the learner’s hand onto the shock plate. As the learner became increasingly present and “real,” the participants were willing to deliver less shock on average. And they were less willing to deliver the maximum amount of shock.

Mean level of shock
400
300
200
100
0
Remote feedback
Voice feedback
Proximity
Touch proximity
Percentage delivering maximum shock
80
60
40
20
0
Remote feedback
Voice feedback
Proximity
Touch proximity



Tuning out the experimenter

Milgram also examined the impact of "tuning out the experimenter"—strengthening or weakening the "signal" of what the experimenter represented. In the *baseline* version, the experimenter stood next to the participant. In the *experimenter absent* version, the experimenter left the room and communicated only by telephone. In the *ordinary person* version, the instructions were given by a confederate acting as another participant. In the *contradictory experimenters* version, one of the two experimenters present announced that he found the proceedings objectionable. As the "signal" from the experimenter weakened, the participants were willing to deliver less shock on average. And they were less willing to deliver the maximum amount of shock.

Mean level of shock
400
300
200
100
0
Baseline
Experimenter absent
Ordinary person
Contradictory experimenters
Percentage delivering maximum shock
80
60
40
20
0
Baseline
Experimenter absent
Ordinary person
Contradictory experimenters

Tuning out the experimenter had a more pronounced effect than tuning in the learner did. Making it *easier* for participants to disobey seems to be more effective than increasing their *desire* to disobey.

FOR CRITICAL THINKING

1. What real-world implications might the "tuning in the learner" studies have for, say, military engagements or online interaction?
2. Can you think of other variations of either "tuning in the learner" or "tuning out the experimenter" that Milgram could have tried to influence participants' willingness to obey?

The results were essentially the same as those obtained by Milgram himself. In Burger’ s study, 70 percent of the participants were willing to administer the next level of shock (165 volts) after hearing the learner’ s protest. This compares with 82 percent of Milgram’ s participants—not a statistically significant difference. Men and women were equally likely to continue past the critical 150-volt level. Today, people seem to react to pressure to obey the same way they did more than 50 years ago (see also Doliński et al., 2017).

1 2 3 4
SHOCK GENERATOR TYPE 2LB
AHR INSTRUMENT COMPANY
WALTHAM, MASS
Output 15 Volts - 450 Volts
VOLTAGE
15 VOLTS
75 VOLTS
135 VOLTS
SLIGHT SHOCK
MODERATE SHOCK
STRONG SHOCK
VERY STRONG SHOCK

REVISITING MILGRAM (A) In Burger’ s 2009 near-replication of the original Milgram experiments from the 1960s, participants faced the same conflict over whether to administer increasing levels of shock (up to 165 volts) to the learner or to call a halt to the learner’ s suffering by refusing to continue. (B) Burger used the same type of bogus shock generator used by Milgram.

Resisting Social Influence

People don’ t always conform, comply, and obey. They sometimes engage in heartening, even heroic, acts of independence—refusing to go along with misguided peers, defying the illegitimate demands of a commanding officer, or blowing the whistle on unethical business practices. What enables people to hold their ground, follow their conscience, and resist being influenced by others?

The pressure to give in to others can be offset by the tendency to resist attempts to restrict freedom of action or thought. According to reactance theory, people experience an unpleasant state of arousal when they believe their free will is threatened, and they often act to reduce this discomfort by reasserting their prerogatives (Brehm, 1956). If your parents say you mustn’ t dye your hair, get a tattoo, or hang out with a particular group of friends, does your desire to do so diminish or increase? Reactance theory predicts that the moment you feel your freedom is being taken away, it becomes more precious, and your desire to maintain it increases.

Once motivated to resist, what factors might increase someone’ s ability to stand firm? One important variable is practice. In Milgram’ s obedience studies, many participants wanted to disobey and even tried to do so, but they weren’ t very good at it (Milgram, 1963, 1974). Maybe if they had been trained to disobey when the situation called for it, they would have done a better job. There is evidence that the Christians who tried to save Jews during the Holocaust tended to be people who had a history of helping others, either as part of their job or as volunteers. Those who helped the most often didn’ t have any higher regard for their Jewish neighbors than those who helped less; they were simply more practiced in reaching out and providing aid.

Another way to increase the ability to resist social influence is to have an ally. In Asch’ s conformity experiment, having just one additional person who departed from the majority was enough to reduce conformity rather dramatically (Asch, 1956). Indeed, the most important lesson of Asch’ s research is just how difficult it can be to be the *lone* holdout. People also need to be wary of potentially slippery slopes (recall the earlier discussion of the foot-in-the-door compliance technique). The stepwise procedure in Milgram’ s experiments may have played an important role in the surprising levels of obedience observed in those studies. It’ s often easier to resist influence from the start, rather than give in and hope to put a stop to things later on. As the Catholic Church teaches, “Avoid the near occasion of sin.”

Governor
Andrew M. Cuomo

12
wcbs 880
1010 WINS
TAX THE RICH

RESISTING SOCIAL INFLUENCE When the Me Too movement erupted, norms and awareness surrounding sexual harassment shifted, and many people who had previously stayed silent about efforts to cover up wrongdoing suddenly refused to do so. Many people took a stand in the face of considerable pressure from their harassers and employers not to step forward. Lindsey Boylan is just one example, reporting a pattern of sexual harassment on the part of New York governor Andrew Cuomo during the time she worked at the state’s economic development agency.

It’s important to keep in mind, too, that many social influence attempts are based on appeals to emotion, as our earlier discussion of the effect of mood on compliance makes clear. A particularly effective strategy for dealing with emotion-based approaches is simply to put off a response. If there is a “first law” of emotional experience, it is that emotions fade and moods change. Therefore, the compulsion to give in because you are caught up in a particular emotion can be diminished simply by waiting to respond. After the initial feelings dissipate, you can then decide whether to comply with a request on the merits of the idea, not on the basis of a bad mood or an intense emotional state. You might feel a strong desire to please when someone asks for a donation, for example, and then later on question whether there are other causes that are more deserving of your money or would put it to better use. Waiting a bit before deciding can put you in a better frame of mind to weigh the relative merits of different causes.

LOOKING BACK

As Milgram’s experiment exemplifies, many factors contribute to people’s willingness to obey leaders who demand unethical behavior. But when circumstances lead the individual to attend closely to the victim, obedience decreases substantially. When circumstances lead the individual to be relatively inattentive to the person in authority, obedience is even more greatly reduced, suggesting that it’s more effective to make it *easier* for participants to disobey than it is to increase their *desire* to disobey. Several elements of the situation may make obedience easier to understand: A person’s attempts to disobey are often blocked; the person in authority often takes responsibility for what happens; and once the obedience begins, there is typically no obvious stopping point.

Glossary

reactance theory

The idea that people reassert their prerogatives in response to the unpleasant state of arousal they experience when they believe their freedoms are threatened.

Chapter Review

SUMMARY

What Is Social Influence?

- There are three types of *social influence*. *Conformity* involves a change in a person's attitudes or behavior to more closely align with those of others, in response to explicit or implicit pressure from others. *Compliance* involves responding favorably to explicit requests made by others. *Obedience* is submitting to the demands of a person in authority.

Conformity

- Mimicry is the (typically) nonconscious imitation of someone else's behavior.
- People sometimes conform because of *informational social influence*: They view the actions of others as informative about what is correct or proper. People also conform because of *normative social influence*: They conform to others to avoid disapproval and other social sanctions.
- Conformity pressure depends on group characteristics. The larger the group's size, the greater its influence, but only up to about four people. Unanimous groups exert more pressure to conform than those with even a single dissenter do. The greater the expertise and status of the group members, the greater their influence.
- People from interdependent cultures are more likely to conform than people from independent cultures are. People in tight cultures face more pressure to obey rules and

conform to societal norms than people in loose cultures do.
- The direction of influence is not always from the majority to the minority. Sometimes minority influence can be substantial, especially when the minority expresses consistent views.

Compliance

- Approaches to compliance include the *foot-in-the-door technique*, in which a person first gets someone to agree to a small request before making a more substantial request. Having complied with the initial, easy request, the need to be consistent leads people to be more likely to comply with the later, more taxing request.
- Norm-based approaches to compliance take advantage of the tendency to look to others for guidance about how to behave. *Descriptive norms* indicate how people actually behave in specific contexts, and *prescriptive norms* indicate how people should behave in various situations. To get people to adhere to a prescriptive norm, descriptive and prescriptive norms should not be pitted against each other.
- Invoking the *norm of reciprocity* involves doing a favor for someone, who may then feel obligated to do a favor for you in return. The *reciprocal concessions technique* (door-in-the-face technique) involves making a concession to get the target person to make a concession as well.
- Putting the targeted person in a good mood is likely to increase compliance because of mood maintenance and because of the influence of the good mood on how the request is interpreted.
- Compliance may also result from a desire for *negative state relief* because an act of compliance can reduce guilt or sadness.

Obedience to Authority

- The study of obedience has been dominated by the Milgram experiments, which demonstrated the surprising willingness of most people to go along with the seemingly harmful demands of an authority.
- Participants in obedience studies are caught in a conflict between two opposing forces: normative social influence and moral imperatives. The balance between these forces shifts toward the former when participants attend more to the experimenter and less to the learner. It shifts toward the latter when participants attend more to the learner and less to the experimenter.
- Although Milgram's results strike nearly everyone as wildly counterintuitive, they can be rendered less surprising by considering that most participants made (ineffective) attempts to terminate the experiment, the experimenter took responsibility for what was happening (thus alleviating the participants' sense of responsibility for what they were doing), and the participants were caught on a "slippery slope" because of the stepwise nature of the demands.
- Various factors can increase a person's ability to resist social influence. According to reactance theory, threats to one's freedom of choice increase the desire to maintain it. Ability to resist can be improved by practice, by having an ally, or by delaying a response to an emotion-based appeal.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. What two reasons appear to explain why people so often mimic one another?

2. Suppose your dining hall is having a contest, and you have to guess how many gumballs are in a giant jar (the closest guess wins). You and a few friends walk up to the gumball jar and tell your guesses to the volunteer running the contest. Your friends all say their guesses out loud, and you go last. You find yourself increasing your gumball estimate to be closer to those of your friends. How could each type of social influence (normative and informational) have affected your guess? How could you reduce the normative social influence in this situation?
3. In the battle for transgender rights, what kind of social influence can trans advocates exert on the majority? Should their goal be to engage public support or to inspire private internalization and acceptance of their arguments among members of the majority?
4. Suppose you want to increase voting rates among members of Generation Z (people born after 1997). Using the different approaches discussed in this chapter, give three examples of how you might do so.
5. In the context of the Milgram experiment, give an example of how altering the “presence” or salience of the experimenter or the learner affects obedience rates.

The answer guidelines for the Think About It questions can be found at the back of the book . . .

ONLINE STUDY MATERIALS

Want to earn a better grade on your test?

Go to **InQuizitive** to learn and review this chapter’s content, with personalized feedback along the way.

CHAPTER
9

Relationships and Attraction

What determines relationship satisfaction later in life?

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你愛妳❤
新娘

Why do people get married?

MENU
tinder
Every connection can change your life
download ›
gotinder.com/about
ld me I was a girl he
drive two and a half
urs to meet"
"He used
propose
"He propose
helicopter r

Are relationships that begin online as satisfying as relationships that begin in person?

OUTLINE

- Characterizing Relationships
- Attraction
- Romantic Relationships

IN THE PILOT EPISODE OF THE POPULAR TELEVISION SERIES *Modern Family*, viewers meet Claire and Phil, parents in a household that—although modern in terms of clothing, language, and technology—isn’t very different from the conventional TV families of several decades ago, such as those in *Leave It to Beaver* and *I Love Lucy.* Claire and Phil are both White, have been married for 16 years, and have three biological children. Phil is the sole breadwinner. Chaos ensues as the oldest daughter, Haley, brings home her first boyfriend.

We then meet Jay, a gruff 60-something-year-old with a well-concealed heart of gold; his beautiful young Colombian wife of 6 months, Gloria; and her son from a previous marriage, Manny. More chaos ensues as people keep assuming Jay is Gloria’s father and Manny declares his love for a girl out of his league.

Next we meet Cam and Mitchell, a gay couple, as they return to Los Angeles with their newly adopted Vietnamese infant daughter, Lily. Still more chaos, this time centered on which of the two men is best suited for the various tasks involved in raising a child and how they should break the news of the adoption to Mitchell’s apparently not-so-accepting family.

When Cam and Mitchell arrive at a family gathering, we discover that Mitchell’s family consists of all the other characters we met earlier. Claire is his sister, and Jay is their dad. This makes Gloria, although younger, Claire and Mitchell’s stepmother and 10-year-old Manny their stepbrother. Modern indeed.

The series captures the complexities that can arise in the extended families of varying compositions so common in today’s world. What can *Modern Family* tell us about relationships and attraction? For one thing, it shows that human beings can find themselves romantically attracted to all kinds of people: people of the same or different sex, people from different races or cultures, and people spanning a considerable age range. It also shows us that despite the usual difficulties of being in an intimate relationship, many different kinds of relationships can be healthy and happy and can meet the needs of the individuals involved.

MODERN FAMILY As this hit TV show illustrates, families can be quite diverse, and people form all sorts of romantic bonds.

This chapter explores a broad range of enduring relationships—with parents, friends, and romantic partners and with members of the same and different sexes. We focus mainly on interpersonal relationships, attachments in which bonds of family or friendship, or love or respect or hierarchy, tie together two or more individuals over an extended period of time. We consider what social psychologists have to say about attraction, about the initial stages of a relationship, and about the characteristics of established relationships. ■

Characterizing Relationships

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Explain how the fundamental need for belonging drives the formation of relationships.
- Distinguish between communal versus exchange relationships and discuss cultural variations in the prevalence of each type of relationship.
- Describe various ways that rewards influence people's satisfaction with their relationships and their likelihood of remaining in them.

Researchers who study relationships face challenges that aren't as common in other areas of social psychology (Finkel & Eastwick, 2008; Gonzalez & Griffin, 1997; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). For example, many studies of relationships can't be true experiments with random assignment of participants to different conditions, because, of course, researchers can't assign individuals to certain relationships or conditions within a relationship. In this kind of research, investigators must grapple with the methodological problem of self-selection, which occurs whenever they are unable to assign participants to the conditions being compared (see Chapter 2). When participants "select" their own condition, researchers can't know with complete confidence whether an observed difference between two conditions is a reflection of the different experiences of the people in those conditions or if it's simply that different types of people gravitate to each of the two conditions. Researchers must rely on longitudinal methods to examine the dynamics that unfold over time in preexisting relationships.

Here’ s an example. Couples who make a special effort to celebrate their wedding anniversary may be less likely to get divorced than couples who don’ t. But is the failure to celebrate an anniversary a *cause* of discord, or is it that people who aren’ t getting along just don’ t celebrate? Despite these methodological challenges, the social psychological literature on relationships is flourishing, revealing fundamental truths about the bonds we form with one another using a wide range of methods.

The Importance of Relationships

Many people from Western cultures define themselves in independent, individualistic terms, focusing on how they are different and separate from others. Nevertheless, human nature is profoundly social, and a person’ s identity and sense of self are shaped by social relationships (see Chapter 3). Indeed, human beings (and many other kinds of animals) have what appears to be a biological need for belonging in relationships.

It’ s self-evident that humans have biologically based needs for food, water, oxygen, warmth, and safety, without which we die. Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary claim that the same is true of relationships: We have a need to be embedded in healthy relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). These researchers offer a number of arguments to support their claim that we all have a biological need—not just a desire—to belong.

> “No more fiendish punishment could be devised, were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof.”
>
> —WILLIAM JAMES

ARGUMENTS FOR THE NEED TO BELONG Baumeister and Leary highlight the evolutionary basis of relationships. Relationships help individuals and their offspring survive, thus increasing the likelihood of passing on one’s genes. Long-term romantic bonds evolved to facilitate reproduction and to raise offspring, who are vulnerable and dependent for many years (L. M. Diamond, 2003; Ellis, 1992). Parent-offspring attachments help ensure that infants and children will survive until they can function independently (Bowlby, 1982). Friendship evolved as a means for non-kin to cooperate in survival-related tasks such as gathering food or defending against predators (Trivers, 1971).

If relationships have an evolutionary basis, they can be expected to have some universal features. Indeed, pioneers in the field of human ethology, who studied hunter-gatherer groups in their natural environments, documented patterns of social behavior that appear to be universal, including caregiving between mother and child, wrestling between siblings, flirtation by young people who are courting, affection between romantic partners, dominance displays between adolescents, and grieving the loss of loved ones (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989).

If the need to belong is truly a need, then that need should be satisfiable. When we are thirsty or hungry, we drink or eat—but only to a point, just until we have satisfied the need. The same appears to be true of our social lives. Consider friendship. In Western European cultures, college students tend to restrict their meaningful interactions to about six friends, on average (Wheeler & Nezlek, 1977). It seems that we satisfy our need for friendship with a limited number of close friends, and once that need is satisfied, we don’t continue to seek other relationships.

> “The best thing to hold onto in life is each other.”
>
> —AUDREY HEPBURN

EVIDENCE FOR THE NEED TO BELONG Far-ranging evidence supports the need to belong in nonhumans and humans alike. In a classic experiment, Harry Harlow (1959) raised baby rhesus monkeys without contact with other rhesus monkeys but with access to two “mother surrogates”—props vaguely resembling monkeys. One prop was covered in cloth, where the monkeys could go for comfort when feeling threatened; the other was made out of wire and could provide milk when the monkeys were hungry (**Figure 9.1**). The monkeys preferred the mother that could provide comfort to the one that could provide food. Still, the monkeys raised with these mothers, but otherwise in isolation, were in no way normal when they reached adolescence. As adolescents, they were highly fearful, couldn’t interact normally with their peers, and engaged in inappropriate sexual behaviors—for example, attacking potential mates or failing to display typical sexual positions during copulation.

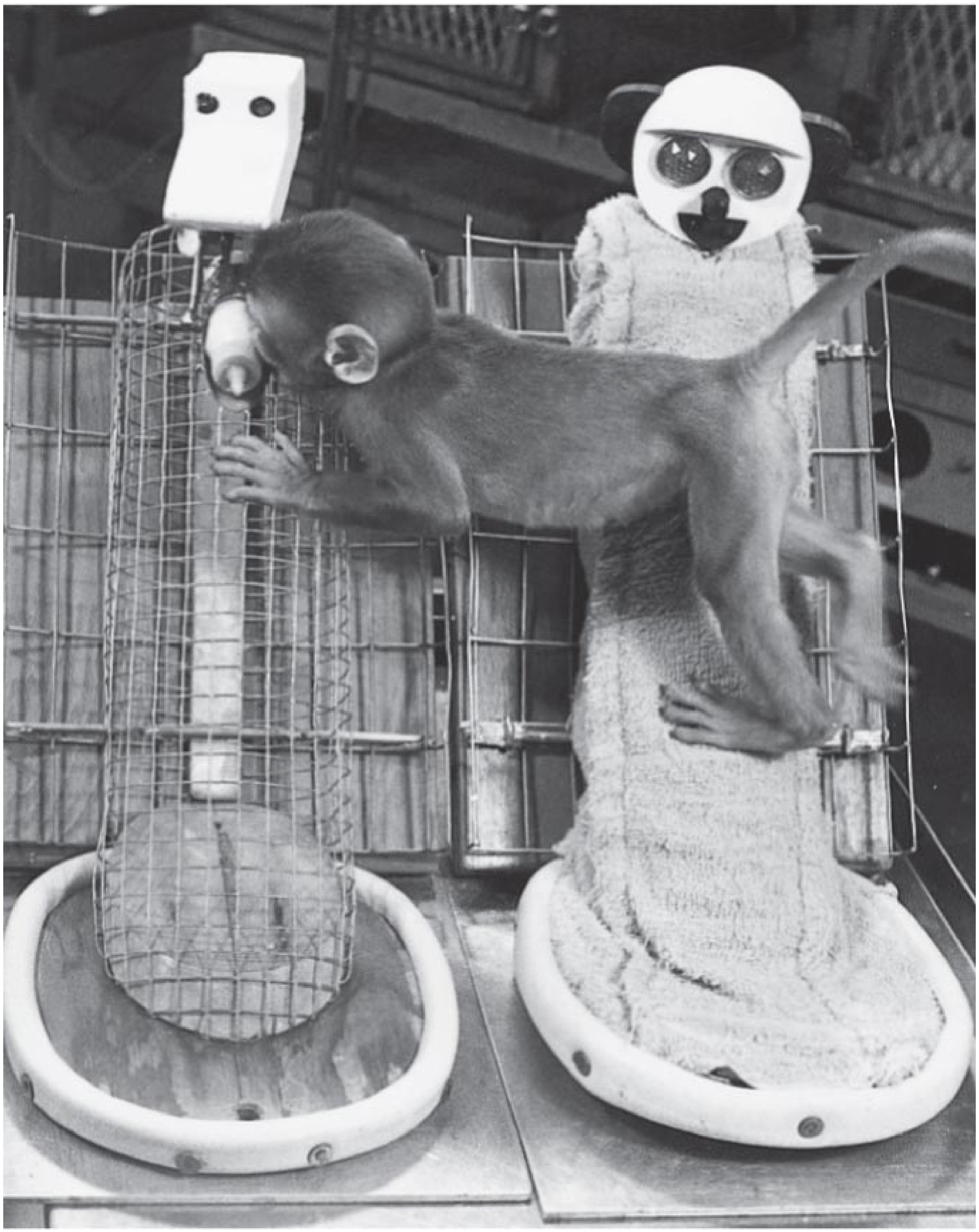


FIGURE 9.1 **SOCIAL ISOLATION LEADS TO SOCIAL IMPAIRMENTS** The rhesus monkeys in Harlow’s classic experiments, reared in isolation but provided with mother surrogates in the form of props resembling monkeys, showed significant social deficiencies in adolescence.

There’ s ample evidence for the need to belong in humans as well. Mortality rates are higher for divorced, unmarried, and widowed individuals (R. M. Kaplan & Kronick, 2006; Lynch, 1979). Suicide rates are also higher for single and divorced individuals (Rothberg & Jones, 1987), as are crime rates (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). A recent synthesis of nearly 150 studies found that the increase in the odds of survival associated with having strong social relationships is comparable, if not larger, to the benefits associated with stopping smoking and being lean rather than obese (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010; Holt-Lunstad, 2018).

According to the so-called marriage benefit, married people fare better than unmarried people do on various indicators of well-being (Gove, Style, & Hughes, 1990; C. Ross, Mirowsky, & Goldsteen, 1990). This extends to gay and lesbian relationships, as seen in a survey in which partnered gay men and lesbians scored higher on well-being than their nonpartnered counterparts (Wienke & Hill, 2009). Having support from others also contributes to good health, strengthening the cardiovascular, immune, and endocrine systems (Feeney & Collins, 2015; Oxman & Hull, 1997; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). Studies like these are subject to methodological and other critiques (see DePaulo, 2015; Kalmijn, 2017; Luhmann et al., 2012), and some research highlights the benefits of being single (DePaulo, 2007; Girme et al., 2016). But overall, social relationships of varying kinds can, and frequently do, confer considerable psychological and physical benefits (Pietromonaco & Collins, 2017; Robles et al., 2014; Slatcher & Selcuk, 2017).

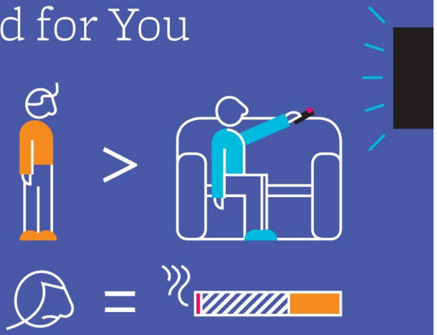
A CLOSER LOOK

(Don’t Wanna Be) All By Myself: The Health Effects of Loneliness

Humans are social animals who depend on interpersonal relationships and communities to survive. Extensive evidence has been found for the negative health effects of loneliness, characterized by a feeling that the desired level of social connection is not being met by the quantity and quality of one’s relationships. Recent studies also show that, in the United States and elsewhere, the prevalence of loneliness has been growing. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, loneliness has become even more widespread. More than ever, people have had to rely on advances in technology to connect with others.

Loneliness Is Bad for You

The effect of social isolation on mortality is greater than the effect of obesity or physical inactivity and comparable with that of smoking.[1]



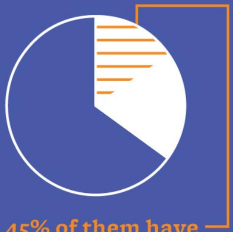
Loneliness is contagious. People directly connected to a lonely person are

52%

more likely to be lonely, and they grow lonelier over time.[2]

Loneliness is cyclical. Lonely people tend to have fewer friends over time.[2]

35% of U.S. adults aged 45 or older are lonely.



45% of them have been lonely for at least 6 years.[3]

43%

of U.S. adults 60 years or older feel lonely.[4]

Loneliness is associated with an increased risk of physical decline and death.[4]

Does Using Social Media Make You Lonelier?

Displacement hypothesis: Social media use replaces offline, face-to-face interactions, thus increasing loneliness.

Stimulation hypothesis: Online interactions strengthen existing relationships and help fend off loneliness.

Both hypotheses have been supported, suggesting that the way people use the internet (passively versus actively), as well as their motives for using it (to avoid social anxiety associated with face-to-face interactions versus to enhance existing social connections), lead to different outcomes in terms of loneliness.[5]

FOR CRITICAL THINKING

1. A person directly connected to a lonely individual is more likely to become lonelier in the future. What are some possible explanations for this finding?
2. Do you ever use social media to strengthen your existing relationships? Do you ever use social media instead of fostering your existing relationships? What differs between these two uses of social media?

1. Holt Lunstad, Smith & Layton, 2010; 2. Cacioppo, Fowler, & Christakis, 2009; 3. Wilson & Moulton, 2010; 4. Perissinotto, Stijacic Cenzer, & Covinsky, 2012; 5. Nowland, Necka, & Cacioppo, 2018.

(A)

(B)

(C)

THE UNIVERSALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS (A, B) Siblings in all cultures play, support, and fight with each other, although the specific kinds of play, support, and conflict may vary from culture to culture. (C) Parents in different cultures show similar kinds of attachment behaviors, including patterns of touch and eye contact.

Different Ways of Relating to Others

This chapter focuses on interpersonal relationships, such as those between friends and between romantic partners. Most of us would agree, though, that we behave in different ways with our romantic partner, with friends from our ultimate Frisbee team, with a professor, waiter, or rabbi, and with our supervisors at work (A. P. Fiske, 1992; D. S. Moskowitz, 1994).

THE NEED TO BELONG There is an evolutionary basis for the need to belong. Not only do elephant parents feed and protect young elephants, but they teach appropriate social behavior that enables their offspring to live among other elephants effectively. If the young elephants grow up without adults, they are likely to become antisocial and aggressive and have difficulty living in groups.

> “Sticks in a bundle are unbreakable.”
>
> —KENYAN PROVERB

COMMUNAL AND EXCHANGE RELATIONSHIPS As economic growth has advanced in the past few decades, millions of young people have left their towns and villages and moved to large cities. For many young people, a small-town life of friends and family has been replaced by one in which they interact mostly with strangers and bosses with whom they have little personal connection. How can we think about these changes in psychological terms?

Margaret Clark and Judson Mills argue that two fundamentally different types of relationships—communal relationships and exchange relationships—arise in different contexts and are governed by different norms (Clark, 1992; Clark & Mills, 1979, 1993, 2012). In a communal relationship, the individuals feel a special responsibility for one another and often expect their relationship to be long term. Communal relationships are based on a sense of “oneness” and a family-like sharing of common identity (Clark & Aragón, 2013; Fiske, 1992). In these relationships, individuals give and receive according to the principle of need—that is, according to which person in the relationship has the most pressing need at any given time (Park, Troisi, & Maner, 2010). Prototypical examples of communal relationships are those between family members and between close friends.

An exchange relationship, in contrast, is trade based and often short term, and the individuals feel no special responsibility for one another’s well-being. In exchange relationships, giving and receiving are governed by concerns about equity (you get what you put into the relationship) and reciprocity (what you receive from your partner is about equal to what you give to your partner). Examples of exchange relationships are interactions with salespeople and bureaucrats or between workers and supervisors in a business organization.

COMMUNAL RELATIONSHIPS IN DIFFERENT CULTURES Communal relationships are especially common in East Asian and Latin American societies. Here, two young Japanese friends show a level of closeness and affection that may be less common in less communal societies.

Societies differ widely in which approach—communal or exchange—they generally prefer. People in East Asian and Latin American societies are inclined to take a communal approach to many situations in which people in European and North American countries would be inclined to take an exchange approach. Consider the question of how businesspeople would treat an employee who had put in 15 good years of service but over the past year has slipped in his job performance and was unlikely to get back on track. East Asian businesspeople tended to feel that the company had an obligation to treat the employee more like a family member and keep him on the payroll (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1993). Western businesspeople were more likely to feel that the relationship was contractual, or exchange based, and thus the employee should be let go. There are differences among Western nations, however: People from Catholic countries are more likely to take a communal stance than are people from Protestant countries are, and Catholics and Protestants in the United States show the same pattern (Sanchez-Burks, 2002, 2004).

REWARDS AND THE SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

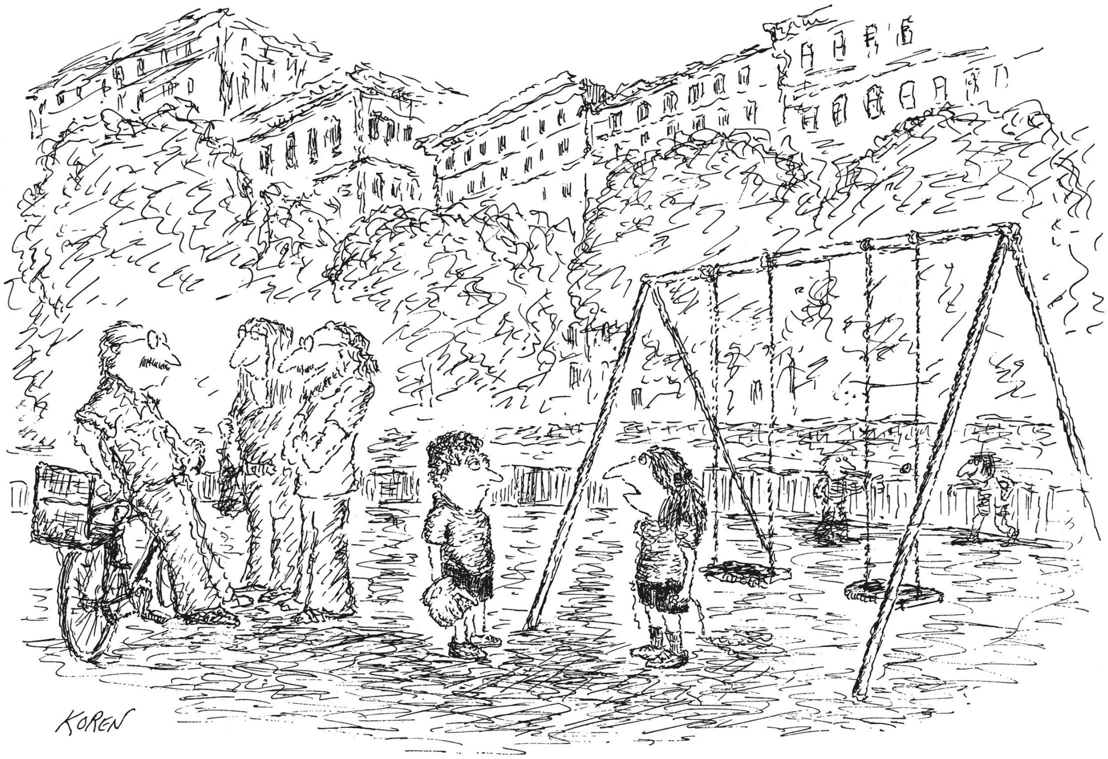
The distinction between communal and exchange relationships notwithstanding, many social psychologists believe that even the most intimate relationships are based, to a certain extent, on rewards. Indeed, one of the most widely accepted principles of interpersonal relationships has the virtue of simplicity: People like and gravitate toward those who provide them with rewards. The rewards don’t have to be tangible or immediate, and they don’t have to come from direct interaction; rather, according to this reward framework, people tend to like other people who make them feel good (Clore & Byrne, 1974; Lott & Lott, 1974).

> “Love is often nothing but a favorable exchange between two people who get the most of what they can expect, considering their value on the . . . market.”
>
> —ERICH FROMM

You can test the reward principle yourself. Think of all your friends, and ask yourself whether this principle helps explain why you like each of them. Often, rewards are easy to identify. You like one friend because you can count on him to share your heartaches as well as your joys, and you like another friend because she’s hilarious and brings levity and laughter to your time together. To take a specific example, research on friendships between straight women and gay men reveals the rewards such relationships offer: They enable each person to get advice on dating and mating from a friend who they know doesn’t have a romantic or sexual agenda (Russell et al., 2013).

Two influential theories explain how rewards shape our relationships. Social exchange theory posits that humans, wanting to maximize their own satisfaction, seek out rewards in their interactions with others and are willing to pay certain costs to obtain those rewards (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult, 1983). Typically, people prefer relationships in which the rewards exceed the costs. On the flip side, if rewarding interactions aren’t available and an individual has access only to relationships in which the costs exceed the rewards, that person is likely to seek out those interactions in which the costs exceed the rewards by the smallest amount.

Social exchange theory details how people rely on certain standards to evaluate the rewards and costs of different relationships (Finkel, Simpson, & Eastwick, 2017). One such standard is known as the comparison level—the expectations people have about what they should get out of a relationship. People who have a high comparison level expect a lot from their relationships, whereas people with a low comparison level expect less. Another standard is the comparison level for alternatives, which reflects the outcomes people think they can get out of alternative relationships (Broemer & Diehl, 2003; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). If you have plenty of attractive suitors knocking at your door, you’re likely to have a pretty high comparison level for alternatives. Both of these standards vary from one person to another and help explain why the same relationship may be evaluated favorably by one person yet negatively by many others (the former person has a very low comparison level) or why an individual never seems to be able to stay in a relationship for more than a few months (this person may have a high comparison level for alternatives).



"Ezra, I'm not inviting you to my birthday party, because our relationship is no longer satisfying to my needs."

A second theory, equity theory, helps us understand how the combination of too many rewards and too few costs in a relationship can be unattractive: It simply feels unfair. This theory maintains that people are motivated to pursue fairness, or equity, in their relationships, such that the ratio of rewards to costs is similar for both partners (Hatfield & Rapson, 2012; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). In other words, both partners ought to receive roughly what they put into a relationship. Thus, a relationship can feel equitable even if one person gets more out of it than the other as long as that person tends to put in more effort.

It should be noted that some aspects of social exchange theory apply mostly to people who live in individualistic, egalitarian cultures, where independence, individuality, and equality are valued. In collectivist cultures, where the group rather than the individual is valued, there are good reasons to suspect that equity isn’t so commonly the goal and that hierarchy and imbalance are more acceptable.

Attachment Styles

Attachment theory was first advanced by John Bowlby, an early advocate of an evolutionary approach to human behavior (Bowlby, 1982; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; Rholes & Simpson, 2015). The central thesis of Bowlby’s theory is that our early attachments with our parents and other primary caregivers shape our relationships for the rest of our lives.

Bowlby noted that, unlike the offspring of many mammals, human infants are extremely vulnerable when born; they require several years to reach even a limited amount of independence and survive by forming intense attachments to parents or parental figures. Evolution has given infants a variety of traits that promote parent-offspring attachments, including their heartwarming smiles, laughs, and coos as well as facial features that evoke love and devotion (Berry & McArthur, 1986; L. Z. McArthur & Baron, 1983). Likewise, evolution has given parents a variety of traits that promote attachment—most notably, strong feelings of parental love and protective instincts toward their offspring (B. Fehr, 1994; B. Fehr & Russell, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1994; Hrdy, 1999).

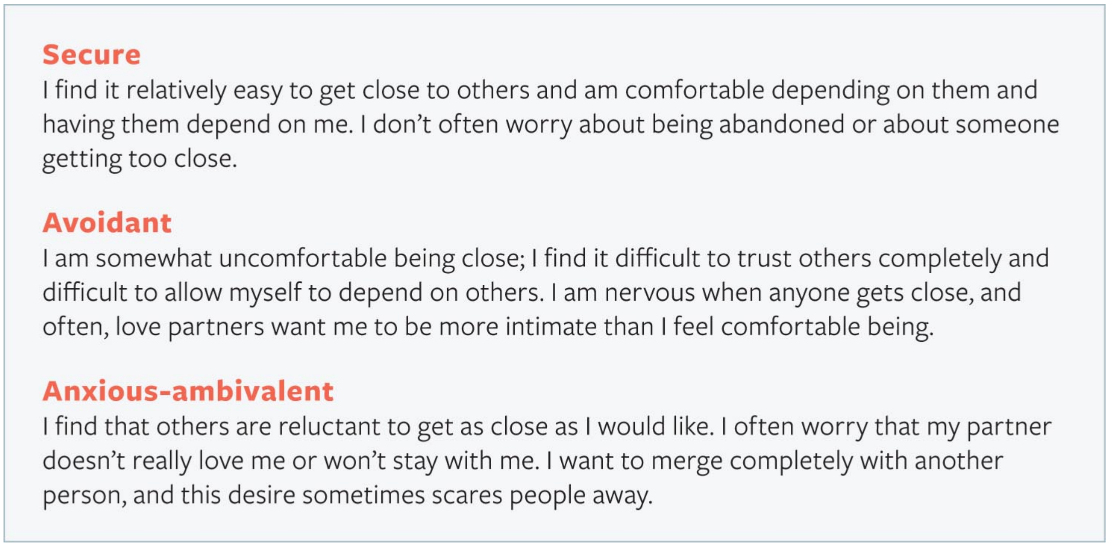
Early in development, children rely on their parents for a sense of security. Knowing that their parents are there to protect and care for them allows them to explore the environment and to learn. A child’s confidence in the secure base the parents provide stems in part from the parents’ availability and responsiveness to the child. Over time, children develop internal “working models” of themselves and relationships based on their parents’ availability and responsiveness (Baldwin et al., 1996; Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980; N. L. Collins & Read, 1994; L. J. Sherman, Rice, & Cassidy, 2015). Internal working models of the self reflect people’s beliefs about their lovability and competence. These models of relationships reflect individuals’ beliefs about other people’s availability, warmth, and ability to provide security. The working models, Bowlby claimed, originate early in life and shape our relationships from cradle to grave, giving rise to distinct styles of attachment.

Inspired by Bowlby’s ideas, Mary Ainsworth classified the attachment patterns of infants according to how they responded to separations and reunions with their caregivers, both in the laboratory and in the home (Ainsworth, 1993; Ainsworth et al., 1978). Using an experimental procedure that came to be known as “the strange situation,” Ainsworth had infants and their caregivers enter an unfamiliar room containing many interesting toys. The infant explored the room and began to play with some of the toys with the caregiver present. Infants who were securely attached were comfortable moving away from their caregivers to explore a novel environment—with the occasional glance back at the caregiver to make sure things were okay. These children felt safe when the caregiver was present even though they weren’t in contact with their caregiver. After a few minutes, a stranger walked in. The stranger remained in the room, and the caregiver quietly left. Returning after three minutes, the caregiver greeted and comforted the infant if the infant was upset. The separation typically caused all infants to be distressed. But securely attached infants had caregivers who, as assessed by outside observers, responded quickly and reliably to their distress cries.

Infants who showed anxious attachment were generally distressed when placed in novel environments, even when their caregiver was in the room. These caregivers weren’t as reliable in their responses to their infants—sometimes intruding on the child’s activities and sometimes not, in an unpredictable fashion. Anxiously attached infants were less comforted by contact with their caregiver when the caregiver returned after an absence. Caregivers who frequently rejected their infants tended to have children with an avoidant attachment style. In a strange situation, avoidant children were the least inclined to seek out the caregiver and sometimes even rejected attention when it was offered.

ATTACHMENT TYPES OR DIMENSIONS? In the late 1980s, Cindy Hazan and Phillip Shaver published an important paper on relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). They translated John Bowlby’s ideas about infant-caregiver attachments to the dynamics of relationships between adults. For example, it’s common for adults to protest separations from family, friends, and romantic partners just as infants often protest being separated from a caregiver. Adults also seek comfort and support from relationship partners, and the security they get from their relationships helps them feel safe to venture forth into the world. Building on these insights, Hazan and Shaver developed adult equivalents of the three attachment types that had been identified in infants: secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent (**Figure 9.2**).

Over the years, countless participants have been presented with the three paragraphs shown in Figure 9.2 and asked to choose the one that best describes their relationships (you might try it yourself). By virtue of their choice, respondents are assumed to relate to others in a certain kind of way: securely attached, avoidantly attached, or anxious-ambivalently attached. Research taking this “attachment types” approach has revealed how profoundly our attachment style influences our relationships. For example, secure people report seeking support from their romantic partners more than either anxious-ambivalent or avoidant people do; they can more readily retrieve trust-related, positive relationship memories; and they deal with trust violations by their partners in a more constructive manner (Girme et al., 2015; Mikulincer, 1998; J. A. Simpson & Rholes, 2017).



Secure

I find it relatively easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don’t often worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close.

Avoidant

I am somewhat uncomfortable being close; I find it difficult to trust others completely and difficult to allow myself to depend on others. I am nervous when anyone gets close, and often, love partners want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.

Anxious-ambivalent

I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn’t really love me or won’t stay with me. I want to merge completely with another person, and this desire sometimes scares people away.

FIGURE 9.2 **THREE ATTACHMENT TYPES** The three adult attachment types were inspired by the identification of three different types of attachment in infants: secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent.

Before long, however, adult attachment researchers began to consider whether thinking about attachment in terms of types might obscure variations within categories (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; N. L. Collins & Read, 1990). Some researchers believe that dimensions, rather than rigid types, more accurately represent attachment styles (Fraley et al., 2015). The anxiety dimension of attachment refers to the amount of fear a person feels about rejection and abandonment within close relationships. The avoidance dimension of attachment refers to the degree to which a person is comfortable with intimacy and dependence in adult relationships or finds them aversive. The individual who scores low on both of these dimensions is, in the language of attachment types, the securely attached person—someone who isn’t anxious about rejection or abandonment, who is comfortable with intimacy, and who seeks closeness to and support from relationship partners. As opposed to simply finding, say, that someone is anxious-ambivalent in terms of attachment style, attachment dimensions help researchers capture the degree of anxiety—variation that corresponds to meaningful differences in how the person thinks, feels, and behaves in close relationships.

ATTACHMENT AND THE QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS A central principle of attachment theory’s characterization of working models is that the attachments you form as a child shape how you relate as an adult to your romantic partners, your children, and your friends. Evidence supports this provocative thesis: Important early life events are associated with attachment styles later in life. In a 40-year longitudinal study of women who graduated from college in 1960, Eva Klohnen and Stephan Bera (1998) found that those who classified themselves as avoidant at age 52 had also reported greater conflict in the home at age 21—31 years earlier. What’s more, individuals classified as secure, avoidant, or anxious at age 1 tend to be similarly classified in early adulthood (Fraley & Spieker, 2003). Another study showed that the observed quality of adolescents’ interactions with their parents at age 15 predicted their self-reported attachment security ten years later (Dinero et al., 2008). Attachment styles may persist for numerous reasons, but an obvious one is that attachment-related expectations of relationship partners can create a self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, avoidantly attached people often do not seek support from a partner because of their negative expectations about others’ availability, and as a result, the partner doesn’t provide support, thereby confirming and maintaining those expectations (Loeb et al., 2021).

As you might expect, a secure attachment style predicts more positive life outcomes (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016; M. L. Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998). Securely attached people report the greatest relationship satisfaction (Shaver & Brennan, 1992). In Klohnen and Bera’s study, secure women were more likely than avoidant women to be married at age 52 (82 percent versus 50 percent) and to report fewer marital problems. Although attachment-related processes and outcomes have been mostly documented in heterosexual relationships, recent research suggests that, by and large, they operate in a similar manner in same-sex romantic relationships (Mohr, Selterman, & Fassigner, 2013).

If you’re concerned that your future relationships are doomed because you’ve had some negative relationship experiences that have left you feeling insecurely attached, don’t despair. Although our attachment styles are somewhat stable over the course of life, there is also room for flexibility and change.

First, studies reveal that people can adapt their attachment style to different relationships (e.g., with parents, friends). Mark Baldwin and his colleagues asked undergraduates to list ten important relationships and indicate their attachment style (secure, anxious-ambivalent, or avoidant) in each relationship (Baldwin et al., 1996). More than 50 percent of participants characterized themselves as having all three attachment styles across their ten relationships. In other words, people have multiple working models of attachment, and any of these can be activated in the many relationships in their adult life (S. Chen, Boucher, & Tapias, 2006). In keeping with this idea, numerous studies have shown that different attachment styles can be momentarily primed or activated—leading a person to respond in, for example, a securely attached manner even if that person is avoidant in most relationships (Baldwin et al., 1996; Hudson & Fraley, 2018; Jakubiak & Feeney, 2016; McClure, Bartz, & Lydon, 2013; Mikulincer et al., 2005).

Second, it is increasingly evident that even within a given relationship, people can and often do change over time in their attachment style (Arriaga et al., 2018; Fraley et al., 2011). In fact, experiences within particular relationships can lead to changes in attachment orientation (e.g., Fraley, Gillath, & Deboeck, 2021; Rholes et al., 2021). For example, researchers have shown that positive intimacy-related experiences with a romantic partner—in other words, experiences that counter avoidantly attached individuals’ working models of relationships—can lead these individuals to experience better relationship quality, to engage in more self-disclosure with their partners, and to report a greater sense of security over time (Stanton, Campbell, & Pink, 2017).

Finally, it’s worth noting that the findings described here about attachment apply most readily to modern Western cultures (Morelli & Rothbaum, 2007). In cultures that place less value on autonomy, people may be less inclined to move far away from their family to, say, pursue a job opportunity. This observation doesn’t imply that such individuals are “insecurely attached.” Instead, it means they view themselves as interdependent with others, especially family members, making them less inclined to go off and live on their own. For more discussion of cultural differences in attachment, see Box 9.1.

LOOKING BACK

Relationships are essential to daily social functioning, and a feeling of belonging is a biological need. In communal relationships, which are generally long term, people are concerned with each other’s needs. In contrast, exchange relationships are generally short term and are governed by concerns of equity and reciprocity. According to social exchange theory, people want relationships in which the rewards exceed the costs; satisfaction with rewards and costs also depends on what people expect to get out of a current relationship or what they think they can get out of an alternative one. Equity theory maintains that people are most satisfied when the ratio of rewards to costs is about equal for both partners in a relationship. Childhood attachments influence adult relationships as well as personal well-being. Although people are often viewed as having a certain attachment type, attachment can also be described in terms of dimensions, with room for variation.

Glossary

communal relationship

A relationship in which the individuals feel a special responsibility for one another and give and receive according to the principle of need. Such relationships are often long term.

exchange relationship

A relationship in which individuals feel little responsibility toward one another; giving and receiving are governed by concerns about equity and reciprocity. Such relationships are usually short term.

social exchange theory

A theory based on the idea that how people feel about a relationship depends on their assessments of its costs and rewards.

comparison level

Expectations people have about what they should get out of a relationship.

comparison level for alternatives

Expectations people have about what they can get out of available alternative relationships.

equity theory

The idea that people are motivated to pursue fairness, or equity, in their relationships. A relationship is considered equitable when the ratio of rewards to costs is similar for both partners.

attachment theory

The idea that early attachments with parents and other caregivers can shape relationships for a person’s whole life.

anxiety dimension of attachment

A facet of attachment that captures the degree to which a person is worried about rejection and abandonment by relationship partners.

avoidance dimension of attachment

A facet of attachment that captures the degree to which a person is comfortable with intimacy and dependence on relationship partners.

Attraction

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe how proximity promotes attraction between people.
- Describe the difference between attraction based on similarity and attraction based on complementarity.
- List two determinants of physical attractiveness and three of its benefits.
- Describe an evolutionary approach to gender differences in mate preferences and how it has been critiqued.

As we have seen, relationships are necessary to our health and well-being, and we form them reflexively. But why are we drawn to some people as friends or romantic partners and not to others? Although we generally know *whether* we like someone, we are often at a loss to explain *why*. To be sure, we know we like people who are kind to us, make us laugh, share our values, and so on. But these obvious influences notwithstanding, sometimes we're drawn to certain people and mildly put off by others for reasons we can't explain. What is the underlying basis of this good or bad "chemistry"? In particular, what leads two people to be romantically attracted to each other?

BOX 9.1

FOCUS ON CULTURE

Building an Independent Baby in the Bedroom

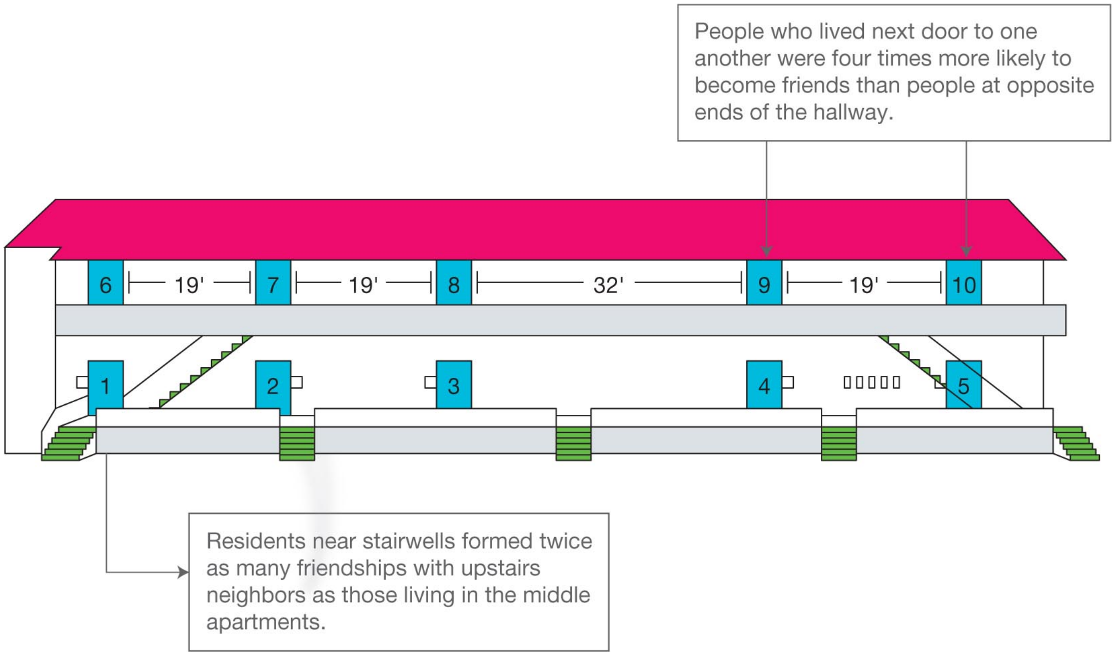
If you are a White, middle-class North American, odds are you slept by yourself in your own bedroom as a child, which probably seems perfectly normal to you. Normal, maybe, but common? Definitely not. There are few cultures in the world where such a sleeping arrangement is customary. In an article titled "Who Sleeps With Whom Revisited," Richard Shweder, Lene Jensen, and William Goldstein (1995) describe the sleeping arrangements of people in many of the world's cultures, which predict fairly well how independent and individualistic a given culture is. In Japan, most children sleep with their parents until they are adolescents. In the non-Western developing world, it is virtually unheard of for very young children *not* to sleep with their parents, and such a practice would be regarded as a form of child abuse. Even in the United States, where you might expect lower rates of children sleeping in their parents' beds, 55 percent of Black children less than 1 year of age sleep with a parent every night, and 25 percent of Black children ages 1–5 sleep with a parent. In a White, predominantly working-class community in Appalachian Kentucky, 71 percent of children between 2 months and 2 years old were found to sleep with their parents, and 47 percent of children between 2 and 4 years of age did as well.

This study reveals the extent to which interdependent and independent self-construals permeate social behavior. Young children in more interdependent cultures are much more likely than children in independent cultures to sleep side by side with their parents. While psychologists can only speculate about the effects of these patterns of sleep on attachment patterns, we might expect secure attachments in independent cultures to be characterized by greater independence and autonomy than secure patterns in interdependent cultures.

Proximity

Who are your best friends on campus? Are they the people who were on your hall freshman year? Are they the ones you encountered most often in a psychology class? Are they your peers in a group that volunteers in the community or works on the college newspaper? Something that *has* to influence whether people become friends or romantically involved is simple physical proximity. And in fact, the most enduring friendships are forged between people whose paths cross frequently.

STUDIES OF PROXIMITY AND ATTRACTION Proximity does indeed affect who forms friendships and romantic relationships (Preciado et al., 2011). One of the first, and most imaginative, studies on this question was conducted at MIT in the 1940s in a married student housing project known as Westgate West, built for returning members of the American military and their families after World War II (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950). The housing project consisted of 17 ten-unit apartment buildings that were isolated from other residential areas of the city. The incoming students were randomly assigned to their residences, and few of them knew one another beforehand. **Figure 9.3** shows the layout of the Westgate West apartment houses.



People who lived next door to one another were four times more likely to become friends than people at opposite ends of the hallway.

Residents near stairwells formed twice as many friendships with upstairs neighbors as those living in the middle apartments.

FIGURE 9.3 **THE EFFECT OF PHYSICAL PROXIMITY ON FRIENDSHIP FORMATION** The location and layout of the married student apartments influenced the extent to which residents formed friendships with one another. Source: Adapted from Festinger et al., 1950.

The investigators asked each resident to name the three people in the housing project with whom they socialized most often. The effect of proximity was striking: Two-thirds of the people that respondents listed as friends lived in their same building, even though only 5 percent of the residents of Westgate West lived in each respondent’ s building. More striking still was the pattern of friendships *within* each building. Even though the physical distance between apartments was quite small—19 feet between the doorways of adjacent apartments and 89 feet between those at the ends of each hallway—41 percent of those living in adjacent apartments listed each other as friends, compared with only 10 percent of those living at opposite ends of the hallway.

Proximity presumably leads to friendship because it facilitates chance encounters. If so, then pure physical distance should matter less than functional distance—the influence of the layout of a physical space that encourages or discourages contact between people. The MIT study shows just how important functional distance is. As Figure 9.3 indicates, the stairs were positioned such that upstairs residents would encounter the occupants of apartments 1 and 5 much more often than the occupants of the middle apartments. And indeed, the residents of apartments 1 and 5 formed twice as many friendships with their upstairs neighbors as those living in the middle apartments did. Notice also that the residents of apartments 2 and 7 were just as far apart as the residents of apartments 1 and 6 and resided directly above one another. But the stairs that pass the door of apartment 1 make it and apartment 6 vastly closer from a functional perspective. No wonder residents of apartments 1 and 6 were 2.5 times more likely to become friends than were the residents of apartments 2 and 7. Thus, it’ s functional distance more than physical distance that is decisive. Proximity promotes friendship because it (literally) brings people together.

> “Despite the fact that a person can pick and choose from a vast number of people to make friends with, such things as the placement of a stoop or the direction of a street often have more to do with determining who is friends with whom.”
>
> —WILLIAM WHYTE, *THE ORGANIZATION MAN*

These findings regarding the effects of proximity have led social psychologists to study other ways in which the social arrangement of our physical environment influences who is attracted to whom. In one imaginative study, Hungarian primary school students were randomly assigned to work near another student at two-person desks (Rohrer, Keller, & Elwert, 2021). Students were more likely to become friends with their desk partner than with other students in their class, and this effect of functional distance was true even when paired students did not have the same gender or ethnic background. In related work, college students who are randomly assigned to be roommates are more likely to become friends with each other than with other students in the dorm, and this is true both of roommates from the same racial background and roommates from different racial backgrounds (Baker, Mayer, & Puller, 2011). Designing physical spaces to foster proximity between people of different backgrounds appears to reduce the barriers to cross-race friendship.

In fact, one early study in this literature suggests that the largest effects of proximity on friendship formation have actually been found between people of *different* races, ages, or social classes. In this study, the researchers examined the friendship patterns in a Manhattan housing project in which half the residents were Black, one-third were White, and the rest were Puerto Rican (Nahemow & Lawton, 1975). Each ethnic group included people of all ages. Proximity had strong effects on who befriended whom: 88 percent of those whom respondents designated as a “best friend” lived in the same building as the respondent, and nearly half lived on the same floor. Yet the effect of proximity was especially pronounced in friendships that developed *across* age and racial groups: 70 percent of the friendships between people of different ages and races involved people who lived together on the same floor, compared with only 40 percent of the same-age and same-race friendships generally. People were willing to look beyond their immediate environment to find friends of their own age and race, but the friendships among people of different ages or races tended to be those with people nearby.

THE MERE EXPOSURE EFFECT Part of the reason proximity has such a big influence on friendship is simply that it makes contact more likely: You’re not going to become friends with someone you haven’t met. But simple contact isn’t the whole story. Robert Zajonc has offered compelling evidence for another reason proximity leads to liking: the mere exposure effect, which is the notion that the more you are exposed to something, the more you tend to like it (Zajonc, 1968). This may strike you as implausible. After all, what about all those songs on the radio that become more irritating each time you hear them? And why are there sayings like “Familiarity breeds contempt”?

In fact, researchers have generated a great deal of evidence for the mere exposure effect (Bornstein, 1989; Montoya et al., 2017; Zajonc, 1968). Some of the evidence is correlational. There is a remarkably strong correlation between how frequently people are exposed to various items (words, fruits, cities, chemical elements) and how much they like those items. For example, people have a strong preference for letters in the English alphabet that they encounter more often (Alluisi & Adams, 1962). It’s hard to imagine that the English language contains so many *e*’s or *r*’s just because people like those letters; it’s more plausible that people like them because they are exposed to them so often.

THE INFLUENCE OF MERE EXPOSURE ON LIKING Many famous landmarks that are beloved and respected today initially elicited anything but reverence. When the Eiffel Tower was completed in Paris in 1889 to commemorate the French Revolution’s centennial, a group of artists and intellectuals, including Alexandre Dumas, Guy de Maupassant, and Émile Zola, signed a petition calling it “useless and monstrous” and “a disgraceful column of bolts.”

In an experimental demonstration of the mere exposure effect, Zajonc (1968) created a stimulus set of Turkish-sounding words that were unfamiliar to his participants, such as *kadirga*, *afworbu*, and *lokanta*. Different words within this set were then shown to participants 0, 1, 2, 5, 10, or 25 times. Afterward, the participants indicated the extent to which they thought each word referred to something good or bad. The more times participants saw a given word, the more they assumed it referred to something good. In another study, Zajonc found that when participants were presented with people’s college yearbook photos, they expressed greater liking for individuals whose photos they viewed more frequently. Within face-to-face and online social interactions, people become more attracted to strangers as they interact with them more frequently (Reis et al., 2011).

> “I don’t like that man. I must get to know him better.”
>
> —ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Perhaps the most intriguing test of the mere exposure effect was conducted with albino rats (H. A. Cross, Halcomb, & Matter, 1967). One group of rats was raised in an environment where selections of Mozart’s quintessentially classical music played for 12 hours each day. A second group was exposed to an analogous schedule of atonal music by the modern composer Schoenberg. The rats were then placed individually in a rigged test cage: The rat’s presence on one side of the cage would trip a switch that caused previously unheard selections of Mozart to play, and the rat’s presence on the other side would generate new selections of Schoenberg. The rats were thus able to “vote with their feet” and express a preference for one type of music or the other.

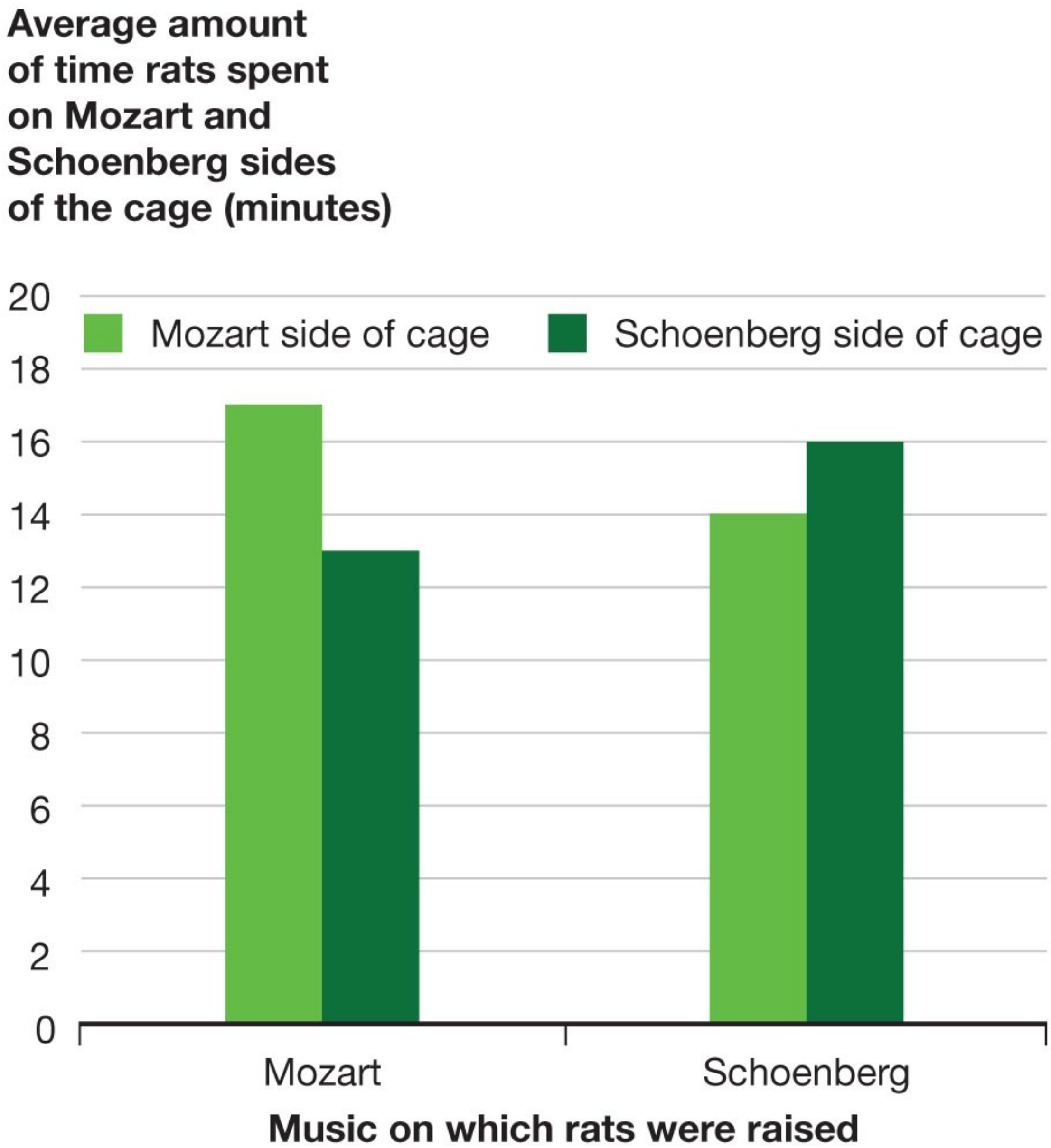


FIGURE 9.4 **REPEATED EXPOSURE AND MUSICAL PREFERENCE** Exposure leads to liking. In this study, exposure to Mozart' s music led to a preference for Mozart, and exposure to Schoenberg' s music led to a preference for Schoenberg. Source: Adapted from Cross et al., 1967.

The results supported the mere exposure effect: Rats raised on a musical diet of Mozart moved significantly more often to the Mozart side of the cage, whereas those raised on a diet of Schoenberg moved to the Schoenberg side (**Figure 9.4**). (Rats in a control condition with no initial exposure to music later exhibited a preference for—you guessed it—Mozart; maybe twenty-first century rats will have developed a taste for Schoenberg.)

This early research inspired more than 100 studies that have explored the conditions in which the mere exposure effect is most likely to occur (Montoya et al., 2017). But is there a limit to the number of exposures that produces the mere exposure effect, after which the effect disappears or reverses? Will your liking of a favorite nature photograph or selfie continue to increase if you see it 50 times? 75 times? 200 times? A number of studies have shown that repeated exposure to different kinds of stimuli—including paintings, photographs, words, and ideographs—tends to increase liking up until about 35 presentations of the stimulus, after which the liking of the stimulus begins to decline.

If you look at an image of Frida Kahlo’s famous painting *The Two Fridas* over and over again, will you like it more? What about photos of people’s faces? Or phrases in your native tongue? Studies have shown that the mere exposure effect is stronger for some kinds of stimuli than for others. With increased exposure, we like paintings, photographs, geometric shapes, and both meaningful and meaningless words more. However, the mere exposure effect doesn’t apply to auditory stimuli, such as brief sounds or, in humans, musical pieces; nor does it work with stimuli that you initially dislike.

At this point, you may be asking *why* mere repeated exposure leads to liking. One explanation is that people find it easier to perceive and cognitively process familiar stimuli: The processing of familiar stimuli is more “fluent.” And because people find the experience of fluency inherently pleasurable, those positive feelings make the stimuli more appealing (Reber, Schwarz, & Winkielman, 2004; Winkielman & Cacioppo, 2001; see also Chapter 4).

Zajonc offered a second interpretation. Upon repeated exposure to a stimulus with no negative consequences, we learn to associate the stimulus with the absence of anything negative and thus form a comfortable, pleasant attachment to it. Mere repeated exposure leads to attraction, in other words, because it reinforces that comfortable, pleasant feeling. This conditioning process helps organisms distinguish stimuli that are “safe” from those that aren’t (Zajonc, 2001).

Similarity

Another determinant of attraction is similarity: People tend to like other people who are similar to themselves (Byrne, Clore, & Smeaton, 1986; Caspi & Herbener, 1990). After all, “Birds of a feather flock together.” Not that friends agree about everything, of course. But some areas of common ground are more important than others. Agreement on core political values, for example, is likely to have more of an impact than similar tastes in food, sports, or music on whether you like someone.

STUDIES OF SIMILARITY AND ATTRACTION One demonstration of the influence of similarity on attraction is that people who are similar in terms of social class, educational level, and religious background tend to become romantically involved with one another (C. R. Schwartz, 2013). People who come from similar backgrounds are more likely to encounter and become attracted to each other through proximity and exposure. Importantly, though, the past couple of decades have seen a marked rise in interreligious and interracial romantic relationships (Rosenfeld, 2008).

Similarity in personal characteristics also predicts romantic attraction. In one study, the members of 1,000 engaged couples—850 of whom eventually married—rated themselves on 88 characteristics (Burgess & Wallin, 1953). When compared with the ratings of “random couples” created by pairing individual members of different couples, the average similarity of the engaged couples was greater on 66 of 88 characteristics than the similarity of “random couples.” The similarity of engaged couples was strongest for demographic characteristics (such as social class) and physical characteristics (such as health and physical attractiveness) and less strong for personality traits (such as leadership and sensitivity). Interracial and interethnic couples tend to be more similar to each other in terms of their personality traits than are couples of the same race and ethnicity. People may compensate for dissimilarity on one dimension by seeking out greater similarity on others (Rushton & Bons, 2005).

A second type of evidence that supports the link between similarity and attraction comes from studies in which individuals are thrown together for an extended period of time. In one study, Theodore Newcomb recruited an unacquainted group of male college students to live for a year in a large house, rent free, in exchange for spending a few hours each week filling out surveys (Newcomb, 1956, 1961). In response to one of the survey questions, the students indicated how much they liked each of their housemates. To an increasing degree over the course of the 15-week study, as the students got to know one another better and better, their liking for each other was predictable based on how similar they were (see also Griffitt & Veitch, 1974).

Research using the “bogus stranger” paradigm offers a third form of support for the proposition that people are attracted to those who are similar to themselves (Byrne, 1961; Tan & Singh, 1995). In these experiments, participants are given the responses to attitude or personality questionnaires supposedly filled out by someone else (but really created by the experimenter to show a specific level of similarity to the participants’ own responses). After reading the responses, the participants rate the bogus stranger on several dimensions, including their liking of the person in question. In study after study of this type, the more similar the stranger is to the participant, the more the participant likes that stranger.

"We are so in sync. I was just about to ask you for a divorce."

More recently, researchers have begun to explore whether similarity predicts attraction in online social networks. In one study, researchers studied the groups that college students form online and, within those groups, the pairs of students who communicate via text message and presumably are friendlier with each other (Bahulkar et al., 2018). The researchers found that college students formed groups with others who were more similar to them—for example, in their politics, their socioeconomic background, and (you might be amused to learn) their drinking habits. They communicated more with, and presumably were more attracted to, other students who were similar to them.

Why does similarity matter? How does it give rise to the felt attraction between strangers, new acquaintances, long-term friends, and potential romantic partners? Adam Hampton and Susan Sprecher have been asking just that question in recent research (Hampton, Fisher Boyd, & Sprecher, 2019). Their synthesis of the literature highlights several reasons for the importance of similarity as a predictor of attraction. First, similarity leads to consensual validation—that is, the affirmation of each individual's values and attitudes. When we perceive someone to be similar to us, we assume they have other positive qualities, thus enhancing our attraction. We also feel more certain about being liked by people who are similar to us. Similarity enables more rewarding interactions, and it allows us to comfortably expand ourselves with novel experiences and with the new perspectives of others.

Inspired by the powerful association between similarity and attraction, social psychologists have explored whether promoting a sense of similarity can bridge divides between people of different backgrounds. Does focusing attention on shared similarities lead people of different political parties or from different religious or racial backgrounds to trust one another more? Lending some hope during these polarized times, studies have found that when people of opposing political parties are primed to think about their shared similarities (such as being a citizen of the same country), their animus toward one another declines (for a review, see Iyengar et al., 2019).

DON’T OPPOSITES ATTRACT? Although most people accept the idea that similarity fosters attraction, complementarity, or the idea that individuals with different characteristics should be attracted to one another, is also intuitively compelling. It does seem that, say, a person who is quiet might get along with someone who likes to talk. The yin and yang of two divergent personalities seems like it *ought* to create a successful unity.

> “Jack Sprat could eat no fat. His wife could eat no lean. And so between them both you see, they licked the platter clean.”
>
> —MOTHER GOOSE NURSERY RHYME

Upon closer inspection, however, there is no reason to expect that complementary attitudes (e.g., on abortion), beliefs (e.g., about the existence of God), or physical characteristics (short versus tall) will lead to attraction. The complementarity hypothesis makes sense only for those traits for which one person’s needs can be met by the other person’s difference—for example, when someone who is dependent is attracted to someone who is nurturing (Levinger, 1964). In general, the evidence for the complementarity hypothesis when it comes to personality traits is mixed, with some supporting and some inconsistent findings (Antill, 1983; Boyden, Carroll, & Maier, 1984; Neimeyer & Mitchell, 1988; R. V. Wagner, 1975).

Complementarity in social status may be a stronger force in predicting attraction. We derive social status, or respect and esteem, from several sources, including our family’s socioeconomic class, our educational achievement, and the prestige of our work (C. Anderson, Hildreth, & Howland, 2015). The complementarity hypothesis suggests an intriguing possibility: Perhaps we become attracted to individuals who enjoy elevated status in a domain where we ourselves are lacking, such as, say, family wealth, but who themselves are lacking in domains where we excel, such as, say, level of education. This idea is known as the *status exchange hypothesis*: Romantic attraction increases when two individuals offer each other elevated status where they themselves are lacking.

In a test of the status exchange hypothesis, Christine Schwartz and her colleagues examined both partners’ family class background (based on the educational achievement of the participant’s parents) and individual educational achievement in 7,398 couples who married between 1968 and 2013 (C. R. Schwartz, 2013). In this study, like others, people married individuals of similar family class backgrounds and personal educational achievement—another nod to the power of similarity in predicting attraction. But at greater rates than would be expected by chance, partners complemented each other's social status: The individual who hailed from a modest family class background in terms of wealth, but who had personally achieved high levels of education, married someone who came from a more distinguished family class background but who had achieved less education.

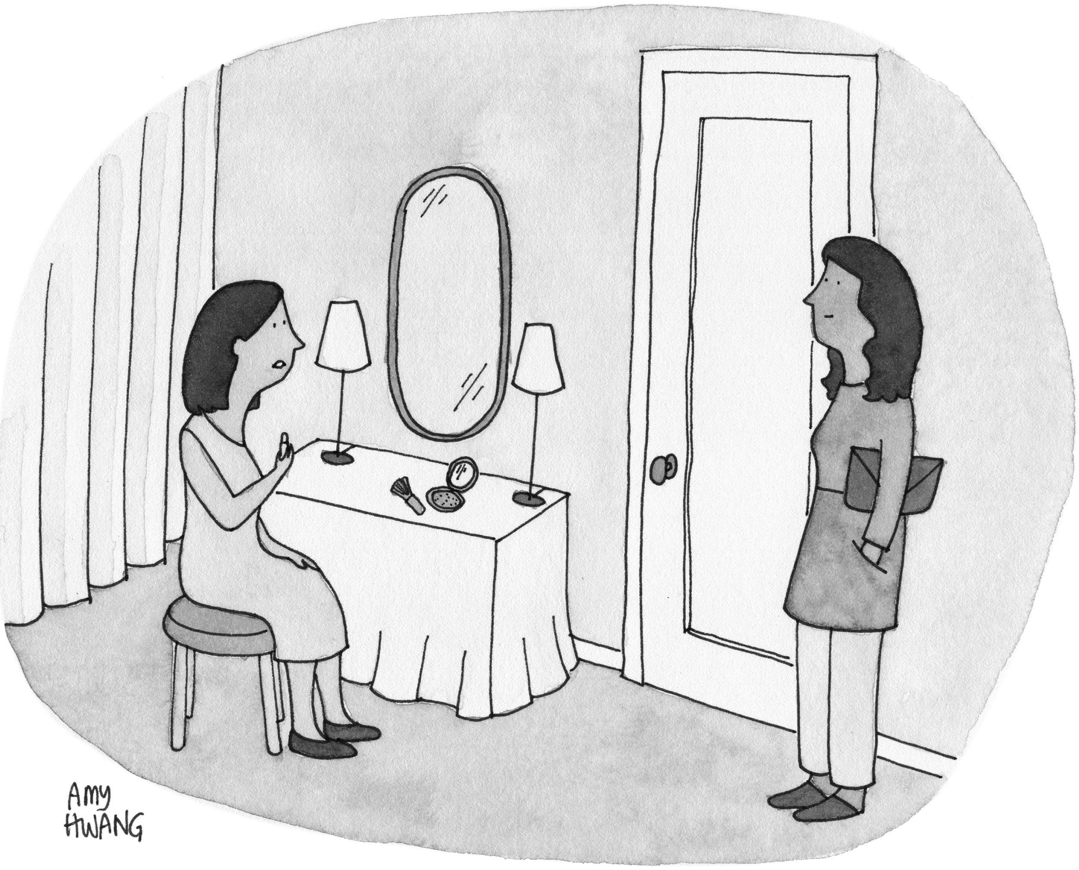
Physical Attractiveness

Not surprisingly, one of the most powerful determinants of interpersonal attraction is physical attractiveness. Because a person's physical appearance is so visible—and visible so *immediately*—it affects our instantaneous, gut reaction to someone we meet for the first time. Partly for this reason, research indicates that a person's looks play an even more important role in interpersonal attraction than you might expect.

> "There are many more obscure, miserable, and impoverished geniuses in the world than underappreciated beauties."
>
> —JERRY ADLER

To start, it's important to keep in mind some important caveats, should you be worried about your own level of attractiveness. First, there's considerable variability in what individuals find attractive and in how cultures define physical beauty. Second, although some people are considered good-looking throughout their lives, there is also variability in how attractive people are over the course of a lifetime (Zebrowitz, 1997). People who are unattractive in their teens can often bloom in young adulthood. Finally, how attractive you are perceived to be depends heavily on how you act. People who are liked more by others, are judged to be more attractive (Kniffin & Wilson, 2004). When we engage in friendly behaviors—warm eye contact and warm smiles, for example—we are judged to be more attractive no matter how physically attractive we are (Montoya, Kershaw, & Prosser, 2018). And perhaps most reassuring of all, romantic partners in happier relationships tend to perceive each other as physically attractive even if other people don't see them that way (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996).

BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS A robust finding is that attractive individuals are more popular as friends and better liked as potential romantic partners than less attractive individuals are. This effect has been shown in studies that correlate various indicators of popularity, such as dating frequency and friendship ratings, with physical attractiveness (Berscheid et al., 1971; Feingold, 1984); in investigations where blind dates are later asked how attracted they are to their partners (Walster et al., 1966); and in studies of online and speed dating in which participants indicate how attracted they are to people they see in photographs or in brief face-to-face encounters (Alterovitz & Mendelsohn, 2009; Asendorpf, Penke, & Back, 2011; Eastwick & Finkel, 2008; Luo & Zhang, 2009).



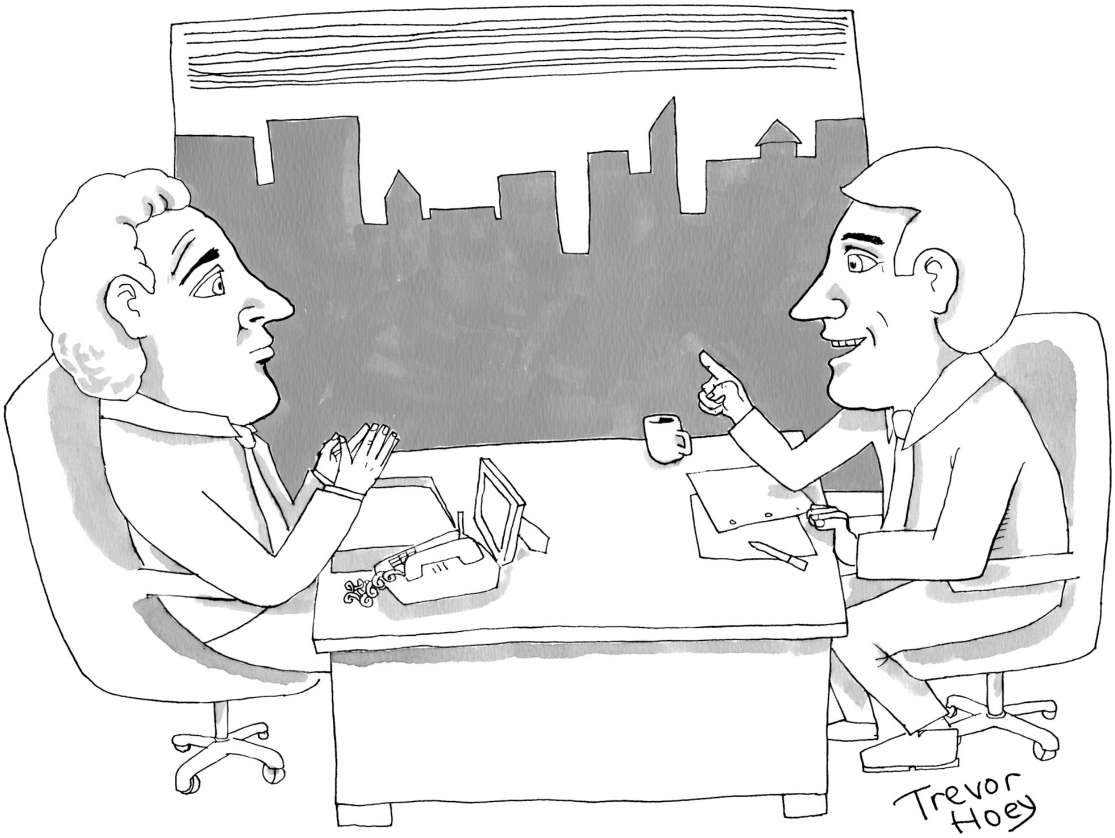
"The secret to looking good is to be good-looking."

But attractive folks benefit in other areas as well. An essay supposedly written by an attractive author is typically evaluated more favorably than one written by an unattractive author (Cash & Trimer, 1984). And men are more likely to come to the aid of an injured female if she is good-looking (S. G. West & Brown, 1975). Other studies have shown that each 1-point increase (on a 5-point scale) in physical attractiveness is worth about $2,000 in additional annual salary—closer to $3,500 in current inflation-adjusted dollars (Frieze, Olson, & Russell, 1991; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994). Stated another way, people who are better-than-average looking can expect to earn nearly a quarter of a million dollars more during their careers than their less attractive counterparts (Hamermesh, 2011).

> "Look your best—who said love is blind?"
>
> —MAE WEST

In addition, jurors often give attractive defendants a break (Efran, 1974), and even when convicted, attractive criminals receive lighter sentences from judges (Gunnell & Ceci, 2010; Stewart, 1980). In one study, participants recommended prison sentences that were 86 percent longer for unattractive defendants than for attractive ones (Sigall & Ostrove, 1975). Crime may not pay, but the wages are clearly better for those who are good-looking.

THE HALO EFFECT Attractive people also benefit from a halo effect: the common belief (accurate or not) that people who are appealing to look at have a host of positive qualities beyond their physical appearance. Thus, we may seek out friendships and romantic partnerships with those who are physically attractive because we believe they have more sparkling personalities, for example, or are more competent in their work. In experiments that required people to make inferences about individuals' personality based solely on photographs, good-looking men and women were judged to be happier, more intelligent, and more popular and to have better personalities, higher incomes, and more professional success (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Eagly et al., 1991; Feingold, 1992b). The only consistently negative inferences about physically attractive individuals are that they are immodest and less likely to be good parents (Dion et al., 1972). Attractive women are sometimes also seen as vain and materialistic (S. K. Johnson et al., 2010).



"Not to worry—I'm going to put our best-looking people on the job."

The attractiveness halo varies in predictable ways across cultures. In independent cultures such as the United States, physically attractive people are assumed to be more dominant and assertive. In interdependent cultures such as South Korea, attractive people are thought to be more generous, sensitive, and empathic than unattractive individuals (Wheeler & Kim, 1997).

Is there any validity to these beliefs? Given the preferential treatment that good-looking people often receive, it would be surprising if that treatment didn’t have any impact on their behavior and their sense of themselves. Indeed, physically attractive people seem to be somewhat happier, less stressed, and more satisfied with their lives, and they believe they have more control over the course their life takes (Diener, Wolsic, & Fujita, 1995; Umberson & Hughes, 1987).

Physically attractive people also behave differently in social interactions and act in ways that generate more favorable impressions in others. In one study, the experimenters rated all participants for physical attractiveness. Participants were then paired up to have 5-minute telephone conversations (Goldman & Lewis, 1977). Even though participants couldn’t see their conversation partners, they still rated the more attractive individuals as more likable and socially skilled than the less attractive participants. In a related study, male participants had a get-acquainted phone conversation with a woman who they were led to believe, based on a photo provided by the experimenter, was more or less attractive (Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977). The women in the chosen photos were quite attractive for half the participants and less attractive for the others. When only the woman’s recorded comments from the conversations were later played to other participants who weren’t shown the woman’s photo (and thus had no preconceptions about her appearance), a rather stunning result emerged. They rated a woman who had talked to a man who *thought* she was more attractive as being warmer and more socially poised than a woman who had talked to a man who thought she was less attractive. Studies like these reveal how being attractive leads to easier, more rewarding social encounters, which in turn instill in good-looking people the confidence and social skills that bring about more rewarding interactions in the future (Langlois et al., 2000; Reis et al., 1982).

THE ROLE OF GENDER Attractiveness is more important in determining women’s life outcomes than men’s. Women deemed unattractive at work have more negative experiences than similarly unattractive men do (Bar-Tal & Saxe, 1976). And physical attractiveness matters more for women, and for gay men, than it does for straight men when it comes to popularity, dating prospects, marriage opportunities, and satisfaction in marriage (Meltzer et al., 2014; Peplau et al., 2009).

Beauty, therefore, can translate into power for women. Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts (1997) have argued that these kinds of external rewards for beauty encourage women’s preoccupation with their own attractiveness, even coaxing them to adopt a kind of outsider’s perspective on their physical selves. This can be costly, however, in terms of their satisfaction with who they are and their confidence in academic and professional settings.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS What do people who are considered attractive look like? What features set them apart? These questions might seem impossible to answer. There is variation from one person to the next in terms of the specific physical preferences that are deemed attractive, and, as we have seen, whether we like the person we are evaluating affects our judgment of their attractiveness (Beck, Ward-Hull, & McLear, 1976). There’s also variation in preferences between cultures and subcultures and across historical periods (Darwin, 1871; Fallon, 1990; C. S. Ford & Beach, 1951; Hebl & Heatherton, 1997).

But such variations don’t mean that all determinants of physical attractiveness are arbitrary or subject to the whims of fashion. People in Western cultures widely agree on who is attractive and who isn’t (Langlois et al., 2000). And they aren’t alone: People from different cultures and subcultures tend to converge in their assessments of who is physically attractive (Cunningham et al., 1995; Rhodes et al., 2001). Asian, Black, and White people, for example, share roughly the same opinions of which Asian, Black, and White faces they find attractive (Bernstein, Lin, & McClellan, 1982; Maret, 1983; Perrett, May, & Yoshikawa, 1994; Thakerar & Iwawaki, 1979).

BEAUTY SHARES MANY QUALITIES ACROSS DIFFERENT ETHNICITIES Across different ethnicities, physical attractiveness is influenced by facial symmetry, clear skin, and signs of youth (in women), and it comes with many social benefits, from better salaries to greater interest from others.

Moreover, infants prefer to look at attractive faces. Experimenters have shown infants as young as 3 months slides of two human faces side by side, one judged previously to be attractive, the other less so. The slides were typically shown to the infant for 10 seconds, and the time the infant spent looking at each one served as an indicator of the infant's preference. The infants showed a clear preference for attractive over unattractive faces (Langlois et al., 1991; Slater et al., 1998). By the end of the first year, when infants' behavioral repertoires are more advanced, they are more inclined to play contentedly with an adult stranger who is attractive than with one who is unattractive.

EVOLUTION AND ATTRACTION Across cultures, what do adults find physically attractive? One attempt to address this question has been guided by evolutionary theorizing and has focused on romantic or sexual attraction. The central idea is that we've evolved to prefer people whose physical features signify health or, more generally, reproductive fitness—the capacity to pass one's genes on to subsequent generations. By producing offspring with reproductively fit individuals, people maximize the chances of passing on their own genes.

This thinking helps explain why we find symmetrical, as opposed to asymmetrical, faces more attractive (Scheib, Gangestad, & Thornhill, 1999; Thornhill & Gangestad, 1993). Bilateral facial symmetry tends to correlate with greater physical health, such as fewer respiratory and intestinal infections (Thornhill & Gangestad, 2005). It thus serves as a signal of an individual's ability to resist disease and, according to the logic of reproductive fitness, is therefore sought out by potential mates, human and nonhuman alike. Research shows that bilaterally symmetrical individuals in a variety of animal species have an advantage in attracting mates (Markow & Ricker, 1992).

This thinking has also been extended to explain our preference for more geometrically average faces that resemble some golden mean of human faces. Namely, faces with more average characteristics—such as average forehead size and average width between the eyes—are linked to greater genetic diversity and parasitic resistance, whereas facial features that deviate from the average could signal chromosomal disorders (Damon et al., 2017). Researchers can create a composite (or average) face out of any number of individual faces (Langlois & Roggman, 1990; Said & Todorov, 2011; **Figure 9.5**). People typically consider such composite faces of both men and women to be more attractive than any individual face in the set of faces from which the composites were constructed. This effect becomes stronger as more individual faces are put into the composite, which makes it less likely to possess the kinds of unusual features typical of individual faces. To a significant extent, then, the more average, or typical, a face is, the more attractive it is, perhaps because it signals the greater health and better genes of a potential romantic partner.

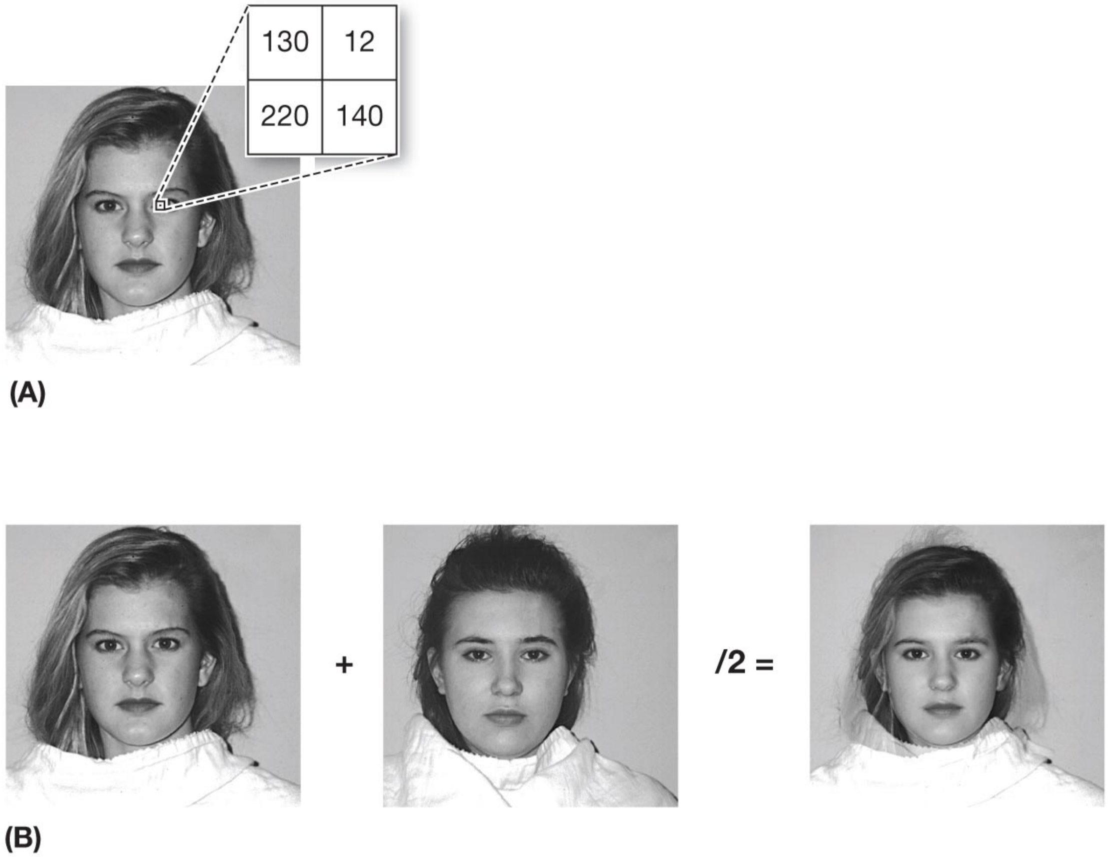


FIGURE 9.5 **ATTRACTION TO AVERAGE FACES** In this study, the researchers created average faces by dividing an individual face into small squares. (A) Each square was assigned a value corresponding to its shade of gray. (B) Researchers averaged the shades of gray across two photos to create an averaged configuration of two faces and continued averaging even more individual faces with the newly created face. Faces that are closest to average are judged to be more attractive. Source: Adapted from Langlois & Roggman, 1990.

(A)

(B)

PREFERRED FACIAL FEATURES (A) Queen Nefertiti was considered physically attractive in her time—and is in ours. Her clear skin, widely spaced and large eyes, small nose and chin, full lips, and high eyebrows are features deemed attractive in all eras. (B) These same features can be found in many people considered very attractive today, such as Angelina Jolie.

Gender Differences in Mate Preferences

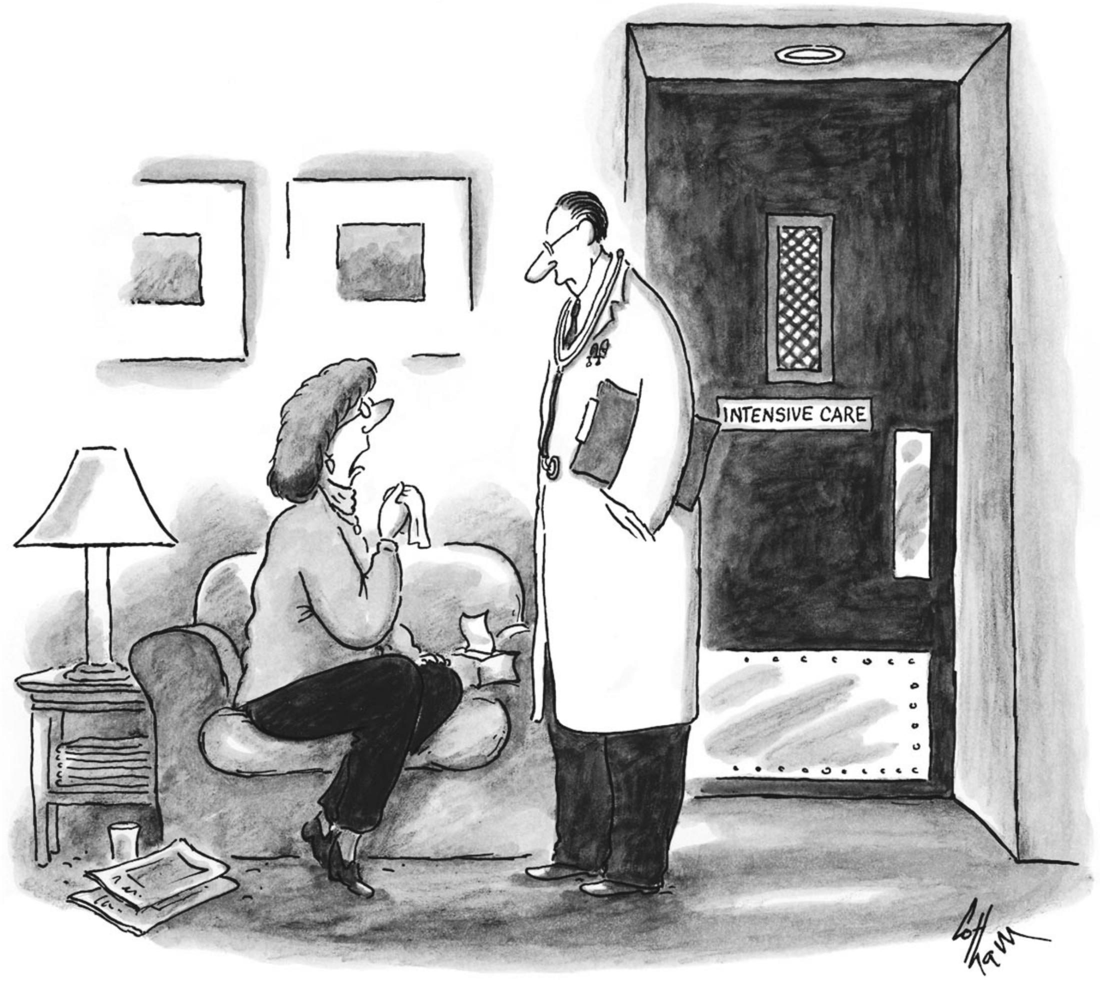
Do men and women look for different qualities in a mate? Let’s examine the evidence for such gender differences and how they are explained by evolutionary and sociocultural perspectives.

INVESTMENT IN OFFSPRING Evolutionary psychologists reason that because of the different investments women and men typically make in offspring, they should look for different qualities in a romantic partner. Women invest more in offspring than men do. At the point of conception, the egg that women provide (one of only 200–250 they will produce in their lifetime) contains both genetic material and nutrients that the developing embryo will need in the initial stages of life. Men, by contrast, provide sperm, which contributes primarily genetic material and little else; the average man produces on the order of hundreds of millions of sperm each day. After conception, of course, in utero development takes place within the woman, taxing her physiologically and preventing her from conceiving another child for at least nine months. During that time, her male partner is able—biologically—to conceive with others. After the child is born, an extended period of nursing and care further taxes the woman and reduces her fertility, thus increasing the time until she’s capable of producing additional offspring.

Given these differences in investment in offspring, women ought to be more selective in their choice of mates. Or stated the other way, evolutionary psychologists argue that men would be expected to be more indiscriminate than women and to seek out more, often short-term, sexual opportunities (for a review see Buss & Schmitt, 2019). In keeping with this hypothesis, in a cross-cultural study with more than 16,000 participants from societies all over the globe, men and women were asked, “Ideally, how many different sexual partners would you like to have?” over various time intervals ranging from one month to the rest of their lives. For every time interval and in all regions of the world, men expressed a desire for a greater number of sexual partners (D. P. Schmitt & International Sexuality Description Project, 2003). Men are also more likely to have affairs when married—and with a greater number of partners than married women who have affairs. When approached by a stranger on a college campus and asked the question, “Would you go to bed with me?” 59 to 70 percent of men in countries including Denmark and the United States said yes, whereas no women in these studies answered in the affirmative (Buss & Schmitt, 2019). Similar trends are observed in studies of gay men, who express less interest in monogamy and a greater interest in having more partners than lesbian or heterosexual women do (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007).

WHAT DO MEN WANT? WHAT DO WOMEN WANT? In heterosexual relations, what do men find attractive in a mate? And if women are indeed more discriminating than men, what do women find attractive in a mate? From an evolutionary perspective, if men are to reproduce successfully, they need to find mates who are fertile. There are no direct cues to fertility, but because women experience a relatively narrow window of lifetime fertility (the “biological clock”), there’s at least one reasonably good indirect cue—youth. Men should thus be drawn to younger women and the cues associated with youth: smooth skin, lustrous hair, full lips, and a figure in which the waist is much narrower than the hips (Buss & Schmitt, 2019; Singh, 1993).

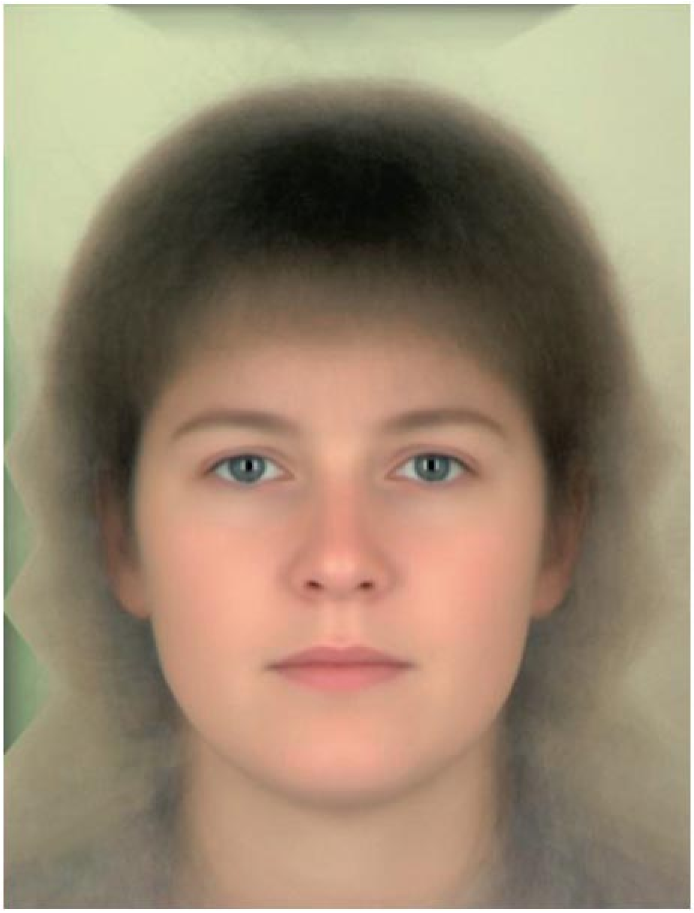
Seeking a partner and having offspring introduces different considerations for women. Although the quality of a man’s sperm tends to decline a bit in older age, men typically continue to be fertile throughout life, so there is less evolutionary pressure for women to be attracted to youthful men. Instead, given the demands of pregnancy and breast-feeding, a critical task for women in our ancestral past was to secure a mate who had resources and who could be counted on to invest those resources in their children. According to evolutionary psychologists, then, women should be attracted to men who either possess material resources or the characteristics associated with acquiring them: ambition, industriousness, social status, and physical strength.



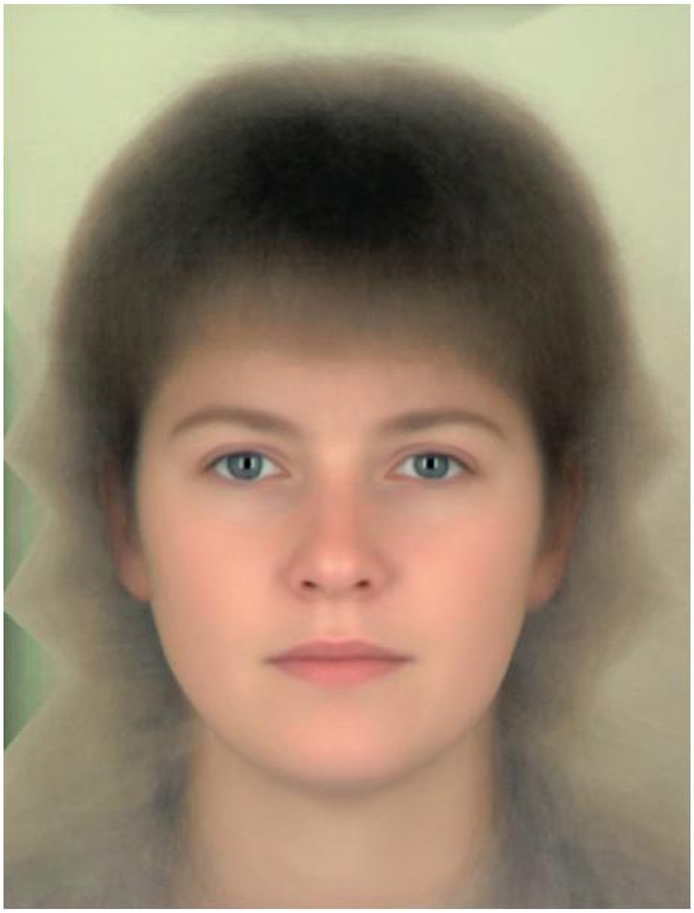
“Will he ever be able to produce revenue again?”

> “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”
>
> —JANE AUSTEN, *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

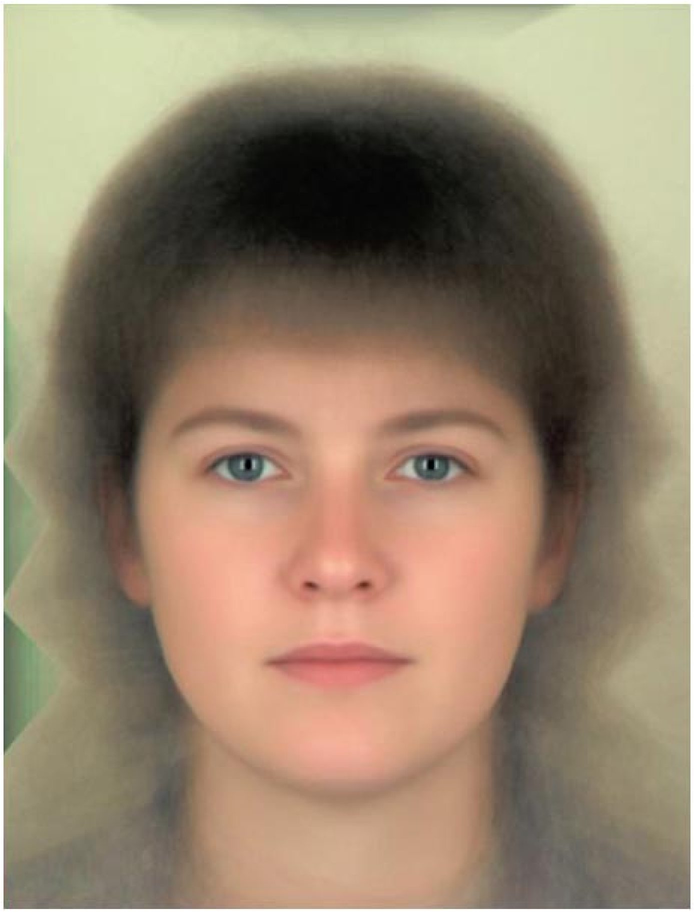
This hypothesis—that men seek youth in potential mates and women seek resources and status—has been examined in studies of personal ads and online dating sites in the United States, Canada, India, and Brazil (Alterovitz & Mendelsohn, 2009; Campos, Otta, & de Oliviera Siqueira, 2002; Gustavsson, Johnsson, & Uller, 2008). These studies reveal a strong tendency for men to seek youth and beauty and to offer material resources and for women to seek resources and accomplishment and to offer youth and beauty. (For more extensive evidence, see Feingold, 1990, 1992a.) It’s noteworthy that similar patterns are observed in the personal ads of gay men, who tend to seek out physical attractiveness in a potential partner more than lesbians do (Hatala & Prehodka, 1996).



(A)



(B)



(C)

ATTRACTION TO EXAGGERATED FEATURES In this study, the researchers made three different kinds of composite faces: (A) a face created by averaging 60 faces, (B) a face created by averaging only the 15 most attractive of these faces, and (C) a face created by calculating the differences between the first two composites and then exaggerating these differences by 50 percent. Participants found the exaggerated face to be the most attractive. Source: Adapted from Perrett et al., 1994.

BOX 9.2

FOCUS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Forming Relationships Online

Of all the ways in which social media have altered our social lives, romantic relationships may have changed the most. Only 50 years ago, young people met their romantic partners through church, their families, and most significantly, their friends. This is no longer the case. Since Match.com went live in 1995, intimate life has been transformed. Close to 50 percent of singles in the United States engage in some form of online dating (Gelles, 2011). In 2009, 22 percent of people had met their romantic partner online; in 2017, that figure was 39 percent (Rosenfeld, Thomas, & Hausen, 2019). Same-sex relationships are especially likely to begin online: One recent estimate suggests that 70 percent of gay and lesbian couples meet online. Online dating has also led to a considerable increase in interracial marriages (Hergovich & Ortega, 2018).

Not only do we increasingly meet our romantic partners online, but much of the interaction between romantic partners has moved online. A 2013 survey from the Pew Research Center found that romantic partners, both young and old, argue online and resolve conflicts, support each other and check up on old flames. Yes, about 40 percent of respondents reported frustration that their partner was distracted by online activity. On balance, though, there is some good news: three quarters of respondents reported that the use of the internet had a positive impact on their relationship (Lenhart & Duggan, 2014).

One particularly important question is whether relationships that start out online differ from relationships that start through a mutual acquaintance in terms of how satisfying they are or how likely they are to end in a breakup. To address this question, John Cacioppo and his colleagues surveyed a nationally representative sample of 19,131 respondents who married between 2005 and 2012. About one-third of the relationships in this sample were initiated online. Marriages that began online, compared with those that began through traditional offline venues, were less likely to result in a marital breakup (separation or divorce) and were more satisfying. These results held even when the researchers controlled for participants’ social class, ethnicity, age, and religious background (Cacioppo et al., 2012).

The advent of online romantic life raises important questions for the scientific study of attraction and relationships (Finkel et al., 2012). Do people misrepresent themselves online (Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008)? How well do social psychological principles of attraction, such as similarity and proximity, explain whom people are attracted to online (Finkel et al., 2012)? Can effective marital therapies be delivered online? The literature on this subject is still young, and as the popularity of online dating continues to grow, there’s no doubt that more research aimed at understanding the processes and outcomes associated with it will follow.

ONLINE DATING An ad for the dating app Tinder.

The gender difference in mate preference also emerged in a survey of more than 10,000 participants from 37 cultures (Buss, 1989, 1994). Respondents were from the West (Germany and the Netherlands), industrialized regions in non-Western countries (Shanghai, China, and Tehran, Iran), and more rural societies (Gujarati Indians and South African Zulus). Notably, when asked what they look for in a mate, both men and women in *all* cultures, regardless of sexual orientation, rated kindness and intelligence more highly than either physical attractiveness or earning potential (Lippa, 2007). Nevertheless, just as evolutionary psychologists would predict, men in nearly every culture rated physical attractiveness as more desirable in a mate than women did. (See Walter et al., 2020, for an updated examination that yielded similar findings across 45 countries around the world.) And in every culture, men preferred marriage partners who were younger than they were. Women consistently preferred partners who were older than they were and consistently assigned greater importance than men did to indicators of a potential mate’s ability to provide material resources, such as having “good financial prospects,” “social status,” and “ambition-industriousness.”

A CRITIQUE OF EVOLUTIONARY THEORIZING ON GENDER DIFFERENCES IN MATE PREFERENCES

The empirical evidence on gender differences in mate preferences, like all controversial findings, has been subject to illuminating critiques. In the study examining 37 cultures, participants indicated their hypothetical mate preferences. But do people act on such preferences in real relationships? An evolutionary account would predict that attractive women should marry high-status, wealthy men.

Such a result, though, could be explained by other dynamics of attraction that we have already considered. For example, perhaps attractive women enjoy elevated status themselves (a benefit of attractiveness) and pair up with more attractive and high-status men (a similarity effect). The challenge for the evolutionary perspective, then, is to show that attractive women pair up with high-status men in part because of the material resources they can offer—independent of the benefits of attractiveness and similarity effects.

The most influential critique has been put forward by Alice Eagly and Wendy Wood, who argue that nearly all the results can be explained without reference to reproductive fitness or any biologically based female/male differences. They argue that because men have, on average, greater physical size and strength and don’t experience the restrictions of pregnancy and nursing, a division of labor has emerged in which men across cultures engage in work outside the home and women are the primary caretakers of children (Eagly & Wood, 1999; W. Wood & Eagly, 2002, 2015). This division of labor has allowed men to have disproportionate control over material resources in virtually all cultures. Being vulnerable economically, women might be more concerned than men are with material needs. Finding mates with resources is one way of meeting those needs—rather than a choice motivated by a biological impulse to find a mate who will increase one’s reproductive fitness.

If Eagly and Wood’s hypothesis is true, then in societies where the two genders have relatively equal power and control over material resources, there shouldn’t be as much emphasis for women on finding a mate with status and economic resources. In a reanalysis of the data from the 37 cultures study, Wood and Eagly (2002) found just this pattern. The greater the gender equality in a society (as indicated by United Nations data on income differential, the proportion of women in the national legislature, and so on), the less importance women placed on a potential mate’s earning capacity. (Although, in this study, the degree of a society’s economic equality didn’t affect the level of importance men placed on women’s attractiveness.) In other research, Zentner and Mitura (2012) found that in cultures with greater gender inequality, such as Turkey and Mexico, the usual pattern of men seeking beautiful mates and women seeking mates with resources was more pronounced. In cultures with greater gender equality, however, such as the United States, Finland, and the Philippines, the pattern of men seeking beautiful mates and women seeking mates with resources was less pronounced.

Evolutionary psychologists, you won’t be surprised to learn, are unmoved by these results. They point out that there is nothing in evolutionary theory that precludes cultural influences, including social and economic effects, on the extent to which men value physical attractiveness in a mate and women prioritize resource potential. The interpretation of the evidence of sex differences in what men and women seek in romantic partners thus remains a source of intense debate.

LOOKING BACK

Proximity causes people to have direct encounters, which can lead to friendships. Mere exposure to a given person leads to greater liking of the person. People are more inclined to be attracted to those who are similar to themselves, in part because similar partners validate each other’s beliefs and values. Physically attractive individuals are more popular, have better dating prospects, are evaluated more positively, and tend to have better social skills. Certain elements of physical attractiveness may indicate reproductive fitness—an individual’s ability to pass on his or her genes to future generations. Interesting evidence and vigorous debate have emerged surrounding the contention that there are gender differences in mate preferences—namely, that women may prefer high-status men who can provide ample resources to a relationship and that men prefer physical attractiveness and youth in a partner.

Glossary

functional distance
The influence of physical layout that encourages or inhibits certain activities, including contact between people.

mere exposure effect
The idea that repeated exposure to a stimulus, such as an object or a person, leads to greater liking of the stimulus.

complementarity
The tendency for people to seek out others with characteristics that are different from, and that complement, their own.

halo effect
The common belief (accurate or not) that attractive individuals possess a host of positive qualities beyond their physical appearance.

reproductive fitness
The capacity to pass one’s genes on to subsequent generations.

Romantic Relationships

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe the different varieties of love.
- Identity the investment model’s three determinants of commitment.
- Identify key demographic and behavioral predictors of relationship dissatisfaction and divorce, and describe some behaviors that strengthen relationship bonds.
- Discuss cultural differences in love and marriage.

Throughout history and across cultures, people’s reasons for marrying have varied dramatically (Coontz, 2005). In hunter-gatherer societies, parents married their children off to members of neighboring tribes. This practice had the effect, whether intended or not, of ensuring more cooperative trading relationships between groups. It also reduced the likelihood of genetic problems stemming from inbreeding within one’s own tribe. For much of Western European history, too, marriages were arranged by parents to consolidate ties with other families, thereby ensuring that property and wealth stayed within the families. In some cultures today, arranged marriages are still common.

But for most of the roughly 2 million couples who get married each year in the United States (the vast majority of all North Americans marry), marriage is about romance—about love. So what is love? How does love change over the course of a long relationship? And what determines which way a relationship will go—toward contentedness and happiness or toward dissatisfaction and breakup?

(A)

(B)

(C)

MARRIAGE ACROSS CULTURES Wedding ceremonies vary in style and format according to cultural practices, but they are held throughout the world. Here are ceremonies in (A) South India, (B) Taiwan, and (C) South America.

What Is Love?

Ask some friends this question, and you'll probably get a different answer from each person you ask. Sure, there'll be some overlapping sentiments in the responses, but there'll be a lot less overlap than you might have thought. When researchers Beverley Fehr and James Russell (1991) asked undergraduates to list as many different types of love as they could, the students came up with 216 different kinds—and almost half of these were mentioned by more than one person!

Most social psychology studies account for multiple varieties of love, but researchers typically organize them into three categories: companionate love, compassionate love, and romantic love (Berscheid, 2010; B. Fehr, 2019; Reis & Aron, 2008; Sternberg, 1986). *Companionate love* is the love we typically experience with friends and family members—people we generally trust, share activities and interests with, and like to be around. *Compassionate love* is akin to a communal relationship characterized by bonds that focus on monitoring and responding to another person's needs, such as parents looking out for their child's well-being or spouses putting their partners' needs above their own. But it's *romantic love* we're referring to when we say we're "in love" with someone. This is the love that we're moved by in poetry and epic romance novels, that we laugh about in romantic comedies, that we search for on dating websites. Romantic love is the love associated with intense emotion and sexual desire, which is why it's sometimes referred to as *passionate love*.

One prominent feature of romantic love is its time course (Eastwick, Finkel, & Simpson, 2019; Karney & Bradbury, 2020; Reese-Weber, 2015). Although there are mixed views on the nature and strength of normative trends in relationship satisfaction over the life span (Bühler, Krauss, & Orth, 2021; Karney & Bradbury, 2020), it is widely believed that early in the course of romantic love, partners often experience powerful, at times all-consuming, feelings of passion, or sexual arousal, for each other. The intensity of romantic passion is expressed in a host of metaphors that capture the single-mindedness and loss of control it entails: Lovers feel "knocked off their feet," "hungry" for each other, and "mad" or "crazy" with desire (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). These feelings of passion are registered in specific patterns of touch, cuddling, and sexual behavior and fluctuate for women as their levels of certain sex hormones, especially estrogen, rise and fall (Konner, 2003).

People typically feel this early passion for a single romantic partner. In Eli Finkel and Paul Eastwick's research using a speed-dating paradigm, a dozen or so young heterosexual women and a dozen or so young heterosexual men arrived at the lab and engaged in a series of rapid-fire, 2-minute get-acquainted conversations with all the participants of the opposite sex (Finkel & Eastwick, 2008). After each interaction, the participants rated their sexual desire and feelings of chemistry for each other. The researchers found that when one person felt unique desire for and chemistry with one other person, those feelings were often reciprocated (Eastwick et al., 2007). Speed-daters who felt chemistry for many other people actually generated little desire or chemistry in others. Apparently, people can detect whether another’ s interest in them is unique or promiscuous.

Surveys indicate that when two people spend increasing amounts of time together, early passion ebbs and a second element of the romantic relationship becomes more prominent—a sense of intimacy (Acevedo & Aron, 2009; Sprecher & Regan, 1998). Couples derive increased comfort and security from the sense of being close and knowing each other better. With deepening intimacy, romantic partners increasingly include their partner’ s perspectives, experiences, and characteristics into their own self-concept (Aron & Aron, 1997; Aron, Aron, & Allen, 1989; Aron & Fraley, 1999). In one study of this second phase, married couples first rated 90 trait adjectives twice, once for how accurately they described themselves and then for how accurately they described their spouse (Aron et al., 1991). After a brief distracter task, participants viewed each trait on a computer screen and indicated as quickly as possible whether the trait was “like me” or “not like me.” As you can see in **Figure 9.6**, participants were faster to identify traits on which they were similar to their spouse and slower to ascribe traits to themselves that their partner didn’ t also possess. As intimacy increases, it’ s almost as if the two partners become one.

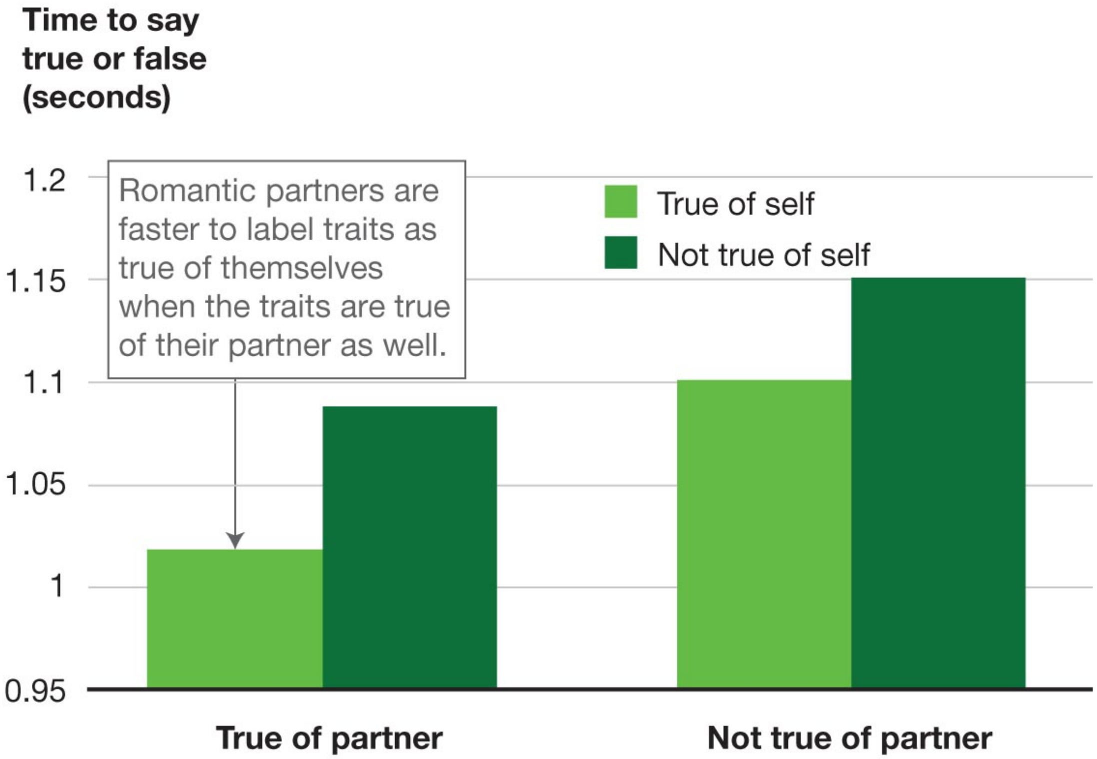


FIGURE 9.6 **CONSTRUING CLOSE OTHERS AS WE CONSTRUE OURSELVES** When we fall in love, does our identity merge with that of our partner? In exploring this question, the researchers in this study had romantic partners label traits as true or not true of the self. Some traits were also true of the partner; others weren’ t. Source: Adapted from Aron et al., 1991.

An Investment Model of Commitment

Of course, we’ve all known people—maybe even ourselves!—who seem unable to commit to romantic relationships. One approach to understanding why some romantic partners remain committed to their relationships while others don’t is provided by Caryl Rusbult’s investment model of commitment (Rusbult, 1980, 1983; Rusbult, Agnew, & Arriaga, 2012). According to this model, which is influenced by social exchange theory (described earlier), once partners have a romantic bond, three determinants make them more committed to each other: satisfaction, the relative absence or poor quality of alternative partners, and investments in the relationship.

The first and perhaps most obvious determinant of enduring commitment is *satisfaction*, based on the partners’ evaluation of the rewards and costs associated with their relationship. One of the strongest indicators of romantic satisfaction in long-term relationships is how much partners feel they get out of the relationship (Cate et al., 1982). Interestingly, recent work suggests that people base their commitment more on their expected future satisfaction in the relationship than their current satisfaction (Baker, McNulty, & VanderDrift, 2017; Lemay, 2016). In other words, people have beliefs (accurate or not) about how satisfied they are likely to be in their relationship down the road, and these beliefs affect their current level of relationship commitment.

But neither current satisfaction nor beliefs about future satisfaction tell the whole commitment story. Whether or not *alternative partners* are available is another strong contributor to the enduring commitment. The fewer options a romantic partner has outside the relationship, the more committed that partner tends to feel, and the more likely that partner is to remain in the relationship. For example, in questionnaire studies, romantic partners who report few potential alternative partners are less likely to break up later (L. K. White & Booth, 1991).

The third determinant of commitment is the magnitude of the couple’s *investments* in the relationship. People are more likely to remain in a relationship if they have invested heavily in it in terms of, for example, time, effort, caring, and love expended, as well as the shared memories, mutual friends, and shared possessions that are part of having a life together. It’s difficult to end a relationship that one has poured a lot of time and energy into. Indeed, for committed romantic partners, the self is literally invested in the relationship in the sense that both people come to view themselves as a single unit, using the plural pronoun *we* to refer to themselves (Agnew et al., 1998).

Recent findings suggest that one person’s investment in a relationship not only increases that person’s own commitment but also increases the partner’s commitment to the relationship. In one experiment, one group of participants listed various ways their romantic partners invested in their relationship, including a specific example that was particularly meaningful and important. Participants in this group subsequently reported greater commitment to their relationships relative to control participants, who either listed only the investments they themselves made or didn’t list any at all (Joel et al., 2013). Participants in the first group also reported more gratitude. It was this gratitude that accounted for their own subsequent higher commitment to the relationship after thinking about their partners’ investments.

THE INVESTMENT MODEL OF COMMITMENT This model maintains that commitment to a relationship depends on satisfaction with the relationship, the relative absence or poor quality of alternatives to the relationship, and investments in the relationship.

In empirical tests of Rusbult’s investment model, participants indicated every six months or so their level of agreement with statements about commitment as well as statements capturing the three determinants of commitment: satisfaction, alternative partners, and investments (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). Examples of these statements are shown in **Table 9.1**. The level of partner agreement for each of the three determinants of commitment early on predicted whether a couple stayed together or broke up down the road.

TABLE 9.1 MEASURING THE DETERMINANTS OF COMMITMENTS IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Determinant	Sample Item
Satisfaction	“Our relationship does a good job of fulfilling my needs for intimacy.”
Alternative partners	“People other than my partner are appealing.”

Investments	“I feel very involved in our relationship—like I’ve put a great deal into it.”
Source: Adapted from Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998.	

The investment model draws strong distinctions among the three determinants of commitment because the constructs are theoretically independent from one another. For instance, a person could have many appealing alternative partners and yet still be quite satisfied in a current relationship. Or a person could have invested a lot into a relationship and still be dissatisfied. In practice, though, the three determinants of commitment are often highly correlated with one another (Le & Agnew, 2003). Thus, for example, people who are satisfied in their relationship tend to also report a high level of investment. Why might this be the case? According to Noam Segal and R. Chris Fraley (2016), one reason that satisfaction, alternative partners, and investment tend to go hand in hand is because they are all related to the degree to which people see their relationship partners as being understanding, validating, and responsive to their needs—a construct that relationship researchers call perceived partner responsiveness (Reis & Clark, 2013; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004). In other words, when people perceive their partners to be high in responsiveness, they tend to feel more satisfied with their relationships, to invest in their relationships, and to view partner alternatives as less attractive. Consistent with this, in a yearlong longitudinal study, Segal and Fraley (2016) found that greater perceived partner responsiveness predicted greater satisfaction, higher investment, and more negative perceptions of alternatives, which, in turn, predicted greater relationship commitment. Though correlational in nature, these data nonetheless offer one explanation for why the investment model’s three determinants of commitment often go together.

Once partners are committed, though, how exactly does their commitment promote relationship longevity? Is it enough to simply be committed? If only it were that easy. Rather, research shows that commitment is linked to longer-lasting relationships because it encourages behaviors that are good for the relationship, such as sacrifice and forgiveness. To illustrate, Finkel and his colleagues have shown that greater commitment is associated with forgiving a romantic partner’s mistakes (Finkel et al., 2002). Commitment is also linked to greater self-sacrifice in couples, as when one partner agrees to move to an undesirable city for the sake of the other partner’s job or when one partner gives up meat because it offends a vegan spouse (Van Lange et al., 1997).

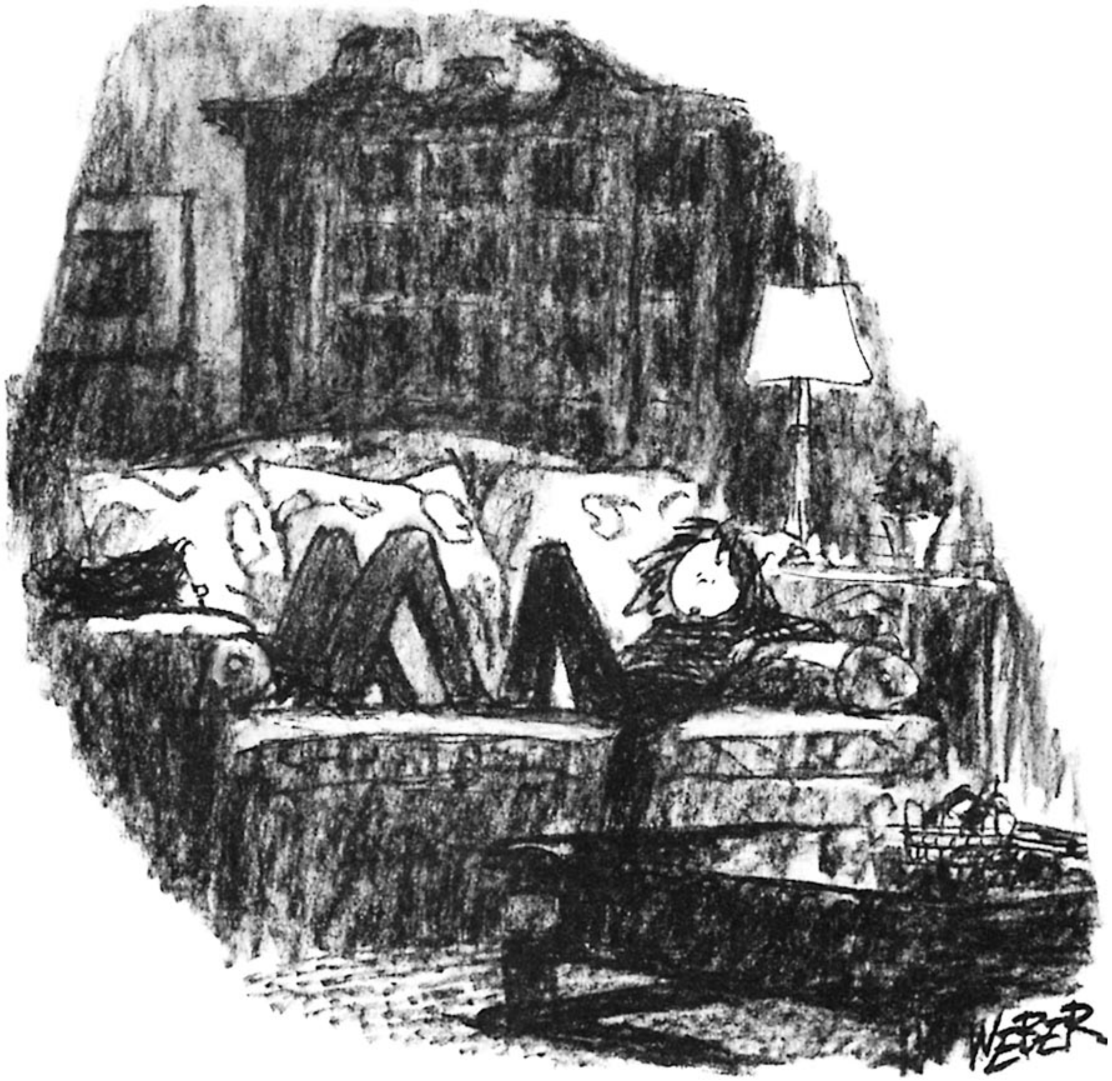
Relationship Dissatisfaction

It’s widely known that roughly 40 to 50 percent of first marriages in the United States end in separation or divorce (T. Martin & Bumpass, 1989; Myers, 2000). Importantly, Benjamin Karney has found that these trends are influenced profoundly by romantic partners’ socioeconomic backgrounds: People from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to marry later and have children at a later age and are less likely to divorce than are people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Karney, 2021).

Less widely known is the finding that marriages are less satisfying today than they were 30 years ago (Finkel et al., 2015; Glenn, 1991; Myers, 2000). Marital conflict stimulates adrenal and pituitary stress responses, which can cause cardiac problems and inhibit immune system protections (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1994). In addition, unhappy marriages can leave a disturbing legacy: Children of divorced parents experience more personal, academic, and romantic difficulties, both during childhood and later in adulthood (Amato & Keith, 1991; Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000). Interestingly, the link between marital quality and psychological well-being has grown stronger over time (Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007). Although this means that happy marriages increase well-being to a greater extent than before, it also means that the link between dissatisfying marriages and poorer psychological well-being has become stronger (Finkel, 2017; Finkel et al., 2015). Given how widespread romantic dissatisfaction is, and the high stakes involved, learning about what predicts romantic dissatisfaction and divorce is important.

PREDICTORS OF DISSATISFACTION AND DIVORCE One way to understand unhappy romantic relationships is to ask whether certain kinds of people or specific circumstances make marital dissatisfaction or divorce more likely. Does the kind of person you marry matter? What about the social class or age of the two people?

To answer these questions, researchers relate measures of marital satisfaction to measures of personality and background. They have learned, first, that personality matters. Neurotic people, who tend to be anxious, tense, emotionally volatile, and melancholy, have less happy romantic relationships and are more likely to divorce (Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Karney et al., 1994; Kurdek, 1993). Similarly, people with low self-esteem (Cavallo et al., 2012; Gomillion & Murray, 2014; Hoplock et al., 2019; Luerssen, Jhita, & Ayduk, 2017; Murray et al., 2001) and people who are highly sensitive to rejection (Ayduk, Gyurak, & Luerssen, 2008; Downey & Feldman, 1996) have greater difficulties in intimate relationships. Moreover, romantic partners and friends who are sensitive to rejection respond with greater hostility when feeling rejected by intimate others (Ayduk et al., 1999; Downey, Feldman, & Ayduk, 2000). This hostility is often directed at others but may be directed at the self as well (Breines & Ayduk, 2015).



"I hope when I grow up I'll have an amicable divorce."

Certain demographic factors also predict problems in romantic relationships. As noted, individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to divorce (Karney, 2021; D. R. Williams & Collins, 1995). Socioeconomic status (SES) refers to a combination of educational background, income, and occupational prestige. Lower SES may introduce financial difficulties and the burdens of finding gratifying and stable work into a relationship, which can lead to the breakup of marriages (Berscheid & Reis, 1998). In addition, research suggests that individuals with lower-SES backgrounds, compared with individuals from higher-SES backgrounds, respond to their more chronically unstable environments by prioritizing self-protection (e.g., withholding trust) over connection with their relationship partners, and such self-protective tendencies can undermine relationship satisfaction (Emery & Finkel, 2021). Age also matters: People who marry younger are more likely to divorce. Two possible explanations for this finding are that younger people may not be as effective at being long-term, committed partners or that people who marry young may not be as successful at choosing the right partners.

THE FOUR MOST HARMFUL BEHAVIORS As romantic partnerships mature, they come to revol conversations and emotional exchanges about children, finances, and intimacy. Are there certain patterns of communication that indicate a relationship is in trouble? John Gottman and Robert Levenson pioneered an approach to studying this question—one that identifies the specific emotions and patterns of communication that predict dissatisfaction and, ultimately, the termination of romantic relationships (Gottman & Levenson, 1992, 1999; Levenson & Gottman, 1983).

HARMFUL RELATIONSHIP BEHAVIORS The conversational behavior of the romantic couple pictured here suggests that the couple may be dissatisfied with their relationship.

BOX 9.3

Not So Fast: Critical Thinking About the Variable Being Measured

Most newlyweds are happy with each other; however, as the harsh reality of a 50 percent divorce rate shows, many don’t stay that way. Is there any way to predict which couples are likely to thrive over the long term and which ones are headed for trouble? If so, would it be better to ask the newlyweds directly what they think of each other, or would an indirect, implicit measure be better?

To find out, a group of investigators asked 135 newlywed couples to rate their relationship on a number of scales, such as from *good* to *bad* and from *satisfied* to *dissatisfied* (McNulty et al., 2013). They also administered an implicit measure of how much the partners liked each other by flashing a picture of the participant’s partner very briefly (for one-third of a second) before showing pictures of positive and negative items (such as flowers and spiders). The participants indicated, as quickly as possible, whether the items pictured were positive or negative, and the investigators used the extent to which their partner’s photo sped up or slowed down participants’ responses to the positive and negative words as an indirect measure of how much they liked their partner (e.g., faster responses to positive compared to negative words after seeing a photo of one’s partner would indicate greater liking). The investigators then checked in with the newlyweds every six months for the next four years and asked how satisfied they were with their relationship.

The indirect measure significantly predicted relationship satisfaction down the road. The more positive the participants felt about each other as newlyweds by that measure, the more satisfied they were four years later. On the other hand, participants’ conscious assessments of how good/bad or satisfied/unsatisfied they felt about their relationship as newlyweds did not significantly relate to how they felt down the road. It seems that people’s automatic, nonconscious attitudes may reveal what’s really going on inside better than their explicit assessments do. As the investigators put it in the title of their paper, “Though they may be unaware, newlyweds implicitly know whether their marriage will be satisfying” (McNulty et al., 2013).

Not so fast. Things aren’t always as they seem, and the phrase “may be unaware” is a telling hedge. What this study shows is that this particular *measure* of the newlyweds’ explicit attitudes is a poor predictor of the course of their relationship. It doesn’t necessarily mean that explicit attitudes generally are a poor predictor. Maybe this measure doesn’t really capture their explicit attitudes. After all, if you had concerns about the person you’d just tied the knot with—“I worry about his drinking”; “Is she going to end up being stubborn like her father?”—you might be unwilling to express them in a survey. And maybe that’s why the explicit measure didn’t predict subsequent relationship satisfaction.

The broader point here is that researchers are fundamentally interested in the relationship between *variables* (sexual orientation and self-esteem, for instance), but they are restricted to working with *measures* of those variables (what someone says about their sexual orientation, a person’s responses to a self-esteem scale). We can get into trouble and draw the wrong conclusion when we confuse a variable with just one *measure* of that variable.

Gottman and Levenson filmed married couples engaged in intense conversations in the laboratory and then studied the videos carefully for clues to romantic dissatisfaction. In a “conflict discussion task,” partners talked for 15 minutes about an issue they both recognized as a source of intense conflict in their relationship, and they tried their best to resolve it. The researchers studied those interactions and coded them for anger, criticism, defensiveness, stonewalling (resisting dealing with problems), contempt, sadness, and fear, as well as several positive behaviors, including affection, enthusiasm, interest, and humor.

In one long-term study using these techniques, Gottman and Levenson (1999) followed the marriages of 79 couples from one city over many years. Based on their observations, they identified “the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”—that is, the four negative behaviors that are most harmful to relationships: criticism, stonewalling, defensiveness, and contempt.

The researchers found, just as you would expect, that married individuals who continually criticize and find fault with their partners have less satisfying marriages. The same is true of people who are prone to stonewalling and avoidance. Romantic partners are also in trouble when they are unable to talk openly and freely about their difficulties without getting defensive—refusing to consider the possibility that something they are doing might be contributing to the conflict. In contrast, the more couples disclose to each other about how they are feeling, the better it is for the relationship (N. L. Collins & Miller, 1994).

And finally, contempt, the emotion felt by one person looking down on another, is particularly toxic to maintaining romantic bonds. **Figure 9.7** shows how frequently couples were observed expressing contempt and whether they stayed together or eventually divorced (Gottman & Levenson, 1999). The couples who eventually divorced expressed more than twice as much contempt as the couples who stayed together.

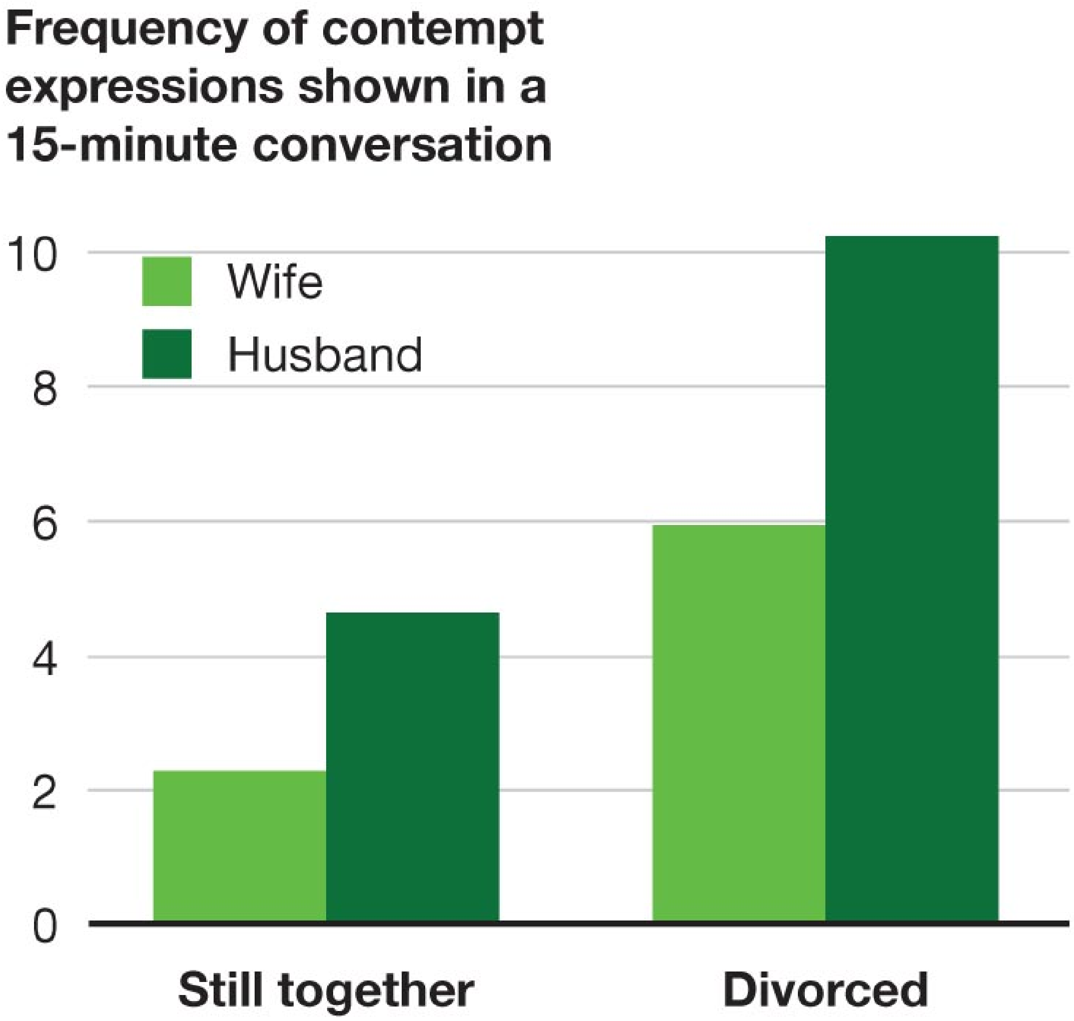


FIGURE 9.7 **CONTEMPT AND MARITAL DISSATISFACTION** In this study, married partners who expressed contempt in a brief conversation about a source of conflict were more likely to be divorced 14 years later than were couples who exhibited less contempt. Feeling contempt is clearly toxic for a relationship. Source: Adapted from Gottman & Levenson, 1999.

Gottman and Levenson’s studies are susceptible to the problem of self-selection (mentioned earlier) and the difficulty of discerning which variable is caused by the other: Do married couples get divorced because they express contempt and other negative emotions, or do they express these emotions because their relationship is already on rocky ground? Additional findings by Gottman and Levenson indicate the former—that negative communication patterns may in fact contribute directly to divorce. In another study of the 79 couples, the researchers used measures of the four toxic behaviors (criticism, stonewalling, defensiveness, and contempt) early in the relationship to predict who would stay together and who would be divorced 14 years later. A large fraction of the couples who showed these four behaviors during a 15-minute conversation were divorced by the end of the study (Gottman & Levenson, 2000).

More recent research has examined the link between one of the Four Horsemen—stonewalling during conflict discussions—and the development of musculoskeletal symptoms (e.g., back pain, arthritis; Haase et al., 2016). The researchers, who followed 156 married couples over a 20-year period, reasoned that stonewalling elicits a high-arousal state and physical tension that, over time, are likely to wear on the musculoskeletal system and lead to the emergence of musculoskeletal symptoms. As in earlier studies on the Four Horsemen, spouses' interpersonal behaviors were carefully coded during 15-minute conflict interactions for signs of stonewalling. The results showed that, controlling for various factors known to influence health (e.g., exercise, smoking), stonewalling behavior predicted increases in musculoskeletal symptoms over time, particularly for husbands. There was no evidence for a link between stonewalling and musculoskeletal symptoms at the start of the study, but this link emerged in subsequent years during these long-term marriages. Such findings indicate that negative relationship behaviors such as the Four Horsemen can harm not only relationship health but also physical health.

DANGEROUS ATTRIBUTIONS Certain construal tendencies—the ways we interpret things—are also related to the weakening of romantic bonds. One of these tendencies is blame. Thomas Bradbury, Benjamin Karney, and their colleagues have looked at the relationship between romantic partners' causal attributions (what they tend to attribute events and behaviors to; see Chapter 4) and their relationship satisfaction (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Karney & Bradbury, 2000; McNulty & Karney, 2001). These researchers have found that dissatisfied, distressed couples make attributions that cast their partner and their relationship in a negative light; that is, they attribute rewarding, positive events in their relationships to unstable causes that are specific, unintended, and selfish. For example, distressed partners might interpret an unexpected gift of flowers from their partner as the result of a whim, particular to that day, and may expect their partner to follow the gift with some selfish request. Happier couples, in contrast, tend to attribute the same positive events to stable causes that are general, intended, and selfless. People who are satisfied in their romantic relationships thus might attribute a gift of flowers to their partner's enduring kindness. Similarly, happier partners attribute negative events—a forgotten anniversary or sarcastic comment—to specific and unintended causes, whereas distressed partners attribute the same kinds of negative events to stable and global causes and see their partners as blameworthy and selfish.

The link between these two patterns of attribution and differing degrees of marital satisfaction is fairly robust, though recent research suggests that this link may be even stronger among couples who have limited financial and social capital. One study assessed the attributions and marital satisfaction of an ethnically diverse (mostly Latino and Black) sample of 231 newlywed couples with relatively low incomes (Nguyen et al., 2021). The researchers reasoned that stressful external circumstances, such as limited financial and social resources, may exacerbate the negative impact of attributions that blame one's partner for problems in the relationship. Consistent with this hypothesis, the researchers found the link between negative partner attributions and lower marital satisfaction to be stronger among couples whose social networks are characterized by fewer financial resources and less exposure to role models of successful marriages. Such results underscore the potential influence of attributions on marital satisfaction but also reveal that external factors can affect how strong this influence is.

Creating Stronger Romantic Bonds

Now that we’ve identified some of the common trouble spots in relationships, let’s turn to what you might do to build healthier romantic bonds. As you can gather from the previous discussion, you might be wise to avoid highly anxious, rejection-sensitive, neurotic individuals when choosing a partner; to minimize criticism, defensiveness, stonewalling, and contempt in your interactions; and to try to interpret your partner’s actions in a charitable fashion. Social psychologists have made progress in identifying other things that may contribute to healthier romantic relationships.

CAPITALIZING ON THE GOOD Healthy patterns of conversation can foster more satisfying bonds. Shelly Gable and her colleagues believe it’s particularly important to capitalize on the good: to share what’s good in your life with your partner and to engage with the other’s good news (Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006; Gable et al., 2004; Reis et al., 2010). In their research, these investigators found that individuals reported greater relationship satisfaction if they tended to receive active, constructive *capitalization* from their significant others—when their partners responded to their good news with engaged enthusiasm (Gable et al., 2004). For example, at the news of a partner’s forthcoming spoken-word event, the actively constructive partner might ask questions about what pieces to read and whom to invite—questions that reveal an active engagement in such an important development in the partner’s life. Capitalization has been shown to be beneficial not only for the health of one’s relationship but also for one’s personal well-being (Gable et al., 2006; Reis et al., 2010).

However, nearly all research on capitalization has been done in Western countries, raising questions about whether there are cultural differences in how often people engage in capitalization with close others and, if so, why. Hyewon Choi and colleagues (2019) explored these very questions, examining differences in the inclination to share positive events with others among Koreans versus European Americans. They found that Koreans are less likely to engage in capitalization (e.g., Koreans report fewer capitalization attempts, Korean children’s storybooks include fewer capitalization attempts) and suggest that one reason may be that Koreans worry about negative relational consequences associated with sharing positive events—for example, that others will be envious—more than European Americans do. Finally, replicating prior work on capitalization, these researchers found a similarly strong link between capitalization and greater personal well-being for individuals from both cultures; however, the lower tendency to engage in capitalization among Koreans may lead them to have lower well-being overall.

> “A baby is an inestimable blessing and bother.”
>
> —MARK TWAIN

BEING PLAYFUL Courtship and the early phases of a relationship involve unusual levels of fun: late-night dancing, candlelit exchanges of poetry, weekend getaways, and other exhilarating activities. The later stages, especially when children are involved, become focused on less inherently enjoyable activities—diaper changing, house cleaning, bill paying, and chauffeuring children to soccer practice. It’s not surprising that having children, though it brings many joys, typically leads to a drop in romantic satisfaction (Myers, 2000). In fact, married partners usually don’t return to their previous level of satisfaction until the children leave home.

(A)

(B)

KEYS TO GOOD RELATIONSHIPS (A) Shared laughter and play are vital to healthy relationships. (B) Open communication and disclosure during conflicts are more helpful than stonewalling.

Keeping an element of playfulness alive in a relationship can help. Experimental work by Art Aron and his colleagues attests to the benefits of a bit of exhilarating silliness in a marriage (Aron et al., 2000). In their study, spouses who had been married for several years engaged in one of two tasks. In a playfully arousing condition, partners were tied together at the knees and wrists with Velcro straps, and they were required to move a soft ball positioned between their heads across a long mat. In the other condition, each partner had to push a ball alone to the middle of the mat with a stick. Spouses reported significantly higher marital satisfaction after engaging in the novel, amusing joint task, compared with participants in the other condition and with a baseline assessed earlier.

A recent study by Cheryl Harasymchuk and colleagues—in which they assessed 122 couples every day over a three-week period—suggests that people who are motivated to pursue growth, intimacy, and rewards in their relationships on a daily basis (i.e., people who have approach-oriented relationship goals, or goals focused on what they stand to gain from a relationship) are more likely to engage in novel, exciting activities with their romantic partners (Harasymchuk et al., 2020). Greater engagement in such activities was associated with greater feelings of self-growth derived from the relationship, which were in turn linked to higher relationship satisfaction.

Unusual, playful activities are fun and exciting—and spouses often misattribute their excitement about the activities to their feelings about their partner, thereby enhancing both partners' satisfaction with the relationship. Laughter often comes with play, and research suggests that shared laughter also bodes well for relationship well-being (Kurtz & Algoe, 2015). One key reason for the relational benefits of shared laughter may be that it fosters perceptions of similarity between the self and the other person laughing (Kurtz & Algoe, 2017)—and, as we have seen, similarity is an important social glue.

> "Laughter is serious. More complicated, more serious than tears."
>
> —TONI MORRISON

FINDING THE GOOD IN PARTNERS Sandra Murray and her colleagues suggest that a tendency to idealize one's romantic partner is another important ingredient in a satisfying intimate bond (Murray & Holmes, 1993, 1997, 2017; Murray et al., 2000; Neff & Karney, 2002). In one study (Murray et al., 1996), married couples and dating partners rated themselves and their partners on 21 traits related to virtues (such as being understanding and patient), desirable attributes within romantic relationships (such as being easygoing and witty), and faults (such as being critical or distant). The researchers compared the participants' ratings of their partners' virtues and faults with their ratings of relationship satisfaction. Those who idealized their romantic partners—that is, rated their partners higher on positive traits than the partners did themselves—were more satisfied with their relationships. Individuals also reported greater relationship satisfaction when their partners idealized them. A different research team examined heterosexual cohabiting couples and lesbian, gay, and heterosexual married couples and found that for all four types of couples, viewing one's romantic partner in an idealized fashion was linked to greater satisfaction with the relationship (Conley et al., 2009).

> "Love to faults is always blind / Always is to joy inclined / Lawless, winged, and unconfined / And breaks all chains from every mind."
>
> —WILLIAM BLAKE

In other studies, investigators have explored precisely *how* people idealize their romantic partners. In one case, people were asked to write about their partners' greatest fault (Murray & Holmes, 1999). Satisfied partners were more likely to engage in two forms of idealization. First, they were more apt to see virtue in their partners' faults. For example, an individual might write that the partner was melancholy but that the melancholy quality gave the partner a depth of character that was incomparably rewarding. Second, satisfied partners were more likely to offer "yes, but" refutations of the fault. For instance, a satisfied individual might write that the partner didn't like to hold down a steady job, but at least that gave the partner more time to help out at home. (For a possible neuroscientific explanation, see Box 9.4.)

BOX 9.4

FOCUS ON NEUROSCIENCE

This is Your Brain in Love

As the work of Sandra Murray and her colleagues suggests, the mind does amazing things when in love, turning faults into charming idiosyncrasies, for example (Murray & Holmes, 1999). Recently, neuroscientists and relationship researchers have joined forces to determine what happens in the brain when a person is in love, and their answers are both intuitive and surprising. In these studies, fMRI images record the brain's pattern of activation while a person looks at a picture of a romantic partner or is in the throes of feeling intense love (Fisher, Aron, & Brown, 2006). Not surprisingly, these neuroimaging methods reveal that romantic love is associated with activation in reward regions of the brain (the ventral striatum)—regions rich with receptors for oxytocin (which promotes trust and love; see Chapter 5) and dopamine (which promotes approach-related behavior). Such patterns have been observed in individuals both in the early stages of romantic love and in long-term romantic relationships (Acevedo et al., 2012).

What may surprise you, though, is that romantic love also deactivates the amygdala, a region of the brain associated with the perception of threat. It appears that in the throes of love, the brain disables your ability to see what is threatening or dangerous about the new love. This finding may help your parents understand why you might fall in love with someone who doesn't quite live up to their standards. Your brain simply isn't reacting to potential signs of risk in your new love—the fondness for motorcycles, the disregard for conventional society. These findings also shed light on what the brain might be doing as you turn your partner's faults and flaws (which in others might activate the amygdala) into pleasing virtues, as the Murray team found.

Love and Marriage Across Cultures

Some generalizations about love and marriage don’t apply to most of the world’s cultures, nor did they even apply to most Western cultures until relatively recently. Although romantic love seems to exist in almost every culture, it has generally not been regarded as a prerequisite to marriage (Dion & Dion, 1993, 2006). The more typical pattern is a marriage arranged by parents. A young man’s parents and a young woman’s parents come to an agreement about the suitability of the pair for each other, and they announce the marriage transaction to their children. Just like it sounds, the term *transaction* often applies in a very economic sense: The prospective bride’s parents provide a dowry, or, somewhat less often, the groom’s parents pay a “bride price.” These sorts of transactions are common today in much of South, East, and Southeast Asia and in much of Africa.

Arranged marriages avoid some of the pitfalls of marrying for romantic love, including mismatches between the couple’s socioeconomic status or religion, two factors associated with relatively high rates of divorce. In an arranged marriage, the in-laws are more apt to be respectful of one another—a stance perhaps less common when the in-laws, usually having not known each other previously, are brought together for reasons having nothing to do with mutual regard or existing respect for one another’s families. Finally, the lack of expectation that there should be romantic love in the first place avoids the natural, gradual transformation of romantic love into a more companionate form of love that can serve as a source of disappointment and discontent.

LOOKING BACK

Love comes in different varieties, and the kind of love experienced in romantic relationships is just one of these. One’s commitment to a relationship is influenced by how satisfying the relationship is, the relative absence or poor quality of alternative partners, and one’s investments in the relationship. People are more likely to feel committed to a relationship when they perceive their partners as being understanding, validating, and responsive to their needs. Personality and demographic factors predict unhappiness in marriage, as do toxic behaviors such as criticism, stonewalling, defensiveness, contempt, and blame. Research on relationships by social psychologists is yielding important insights about successful and rewarding relationships in which partners capitalize on the good, choose to be playful, and see each other in a flattering light.

Glossary

investment model of commitment

A model of interpersonal relationships maintains there are three determinants that make partners more committed to each other: relationship satisfaction, few alternative partners, and investments in the relationship.

perceived partner responsiveness

The degree to which people perceive their partners as being understanding, validating, and responsive to their needs.

Chapter Review

SUMMARY

Characterizing Relationships

- The need to belong is biologically based, as evidenced by the evolutionary benefits and universality of human relationships and the negative consequences that result from their absence.
- In long-term *communal relationships*, people feel responsible for each other; in short-term *exchange relationships*, people are concerned with equity and reciprocity.
- *Social exchange theory* is based on the idea that people’s feelings about a relationship depend on their assessments of its costs and rewards and what they believe alternative relationships can offer.
- According to *attachment theory*, early attachments with parents and other caregivers shape relationships for a person’s whole life. The two dimensions of attachment are *anxiety* (fear of rejection) and *avoidance* (discomfort with intimacy). Although attachment style is relatively stable and can have wide-ranging effects on a person’s well-being throughout life, there is also room for change in a person’s attachment orientation over time and with specific partners.

Attraction

- Proximity, the sheer closeness of contact, leads to attraction and liking. Liking can be influenced by the *functional distance* created by the physical layout of a

living arrangement that encourages social contact. This is partly explained by the *mere exposure effect*, the tendency to like a stimulus more the more frequently it is encountered.
- Similarity influences attraction because people like others who resemble them in their class background, recreational preferences, and core values and beliefs. There is little evidence that opposites attract, except when one partner's need can be fulfilled by the other's different traits.
- Physically attractive people are more popular, have more dating opportunities, earn more money, and receive lighter sentences for crimes. Because of the *halo effect*, they are believed to have many positive qualities that go beyond their physical appearance. Physical appearance affects the lives of women more than the lives of men.
- *Reproductive fitness* is the capacity to pass one's genes on to future generations. People seek mates with characteristics, such as the ability to resist disease, that enhance the likelihood of reproductive success.
- Evolutionary psychologists believe that parental investment leads men to prefer women who appear to be fertile and leads women to prefer men who can provide for them and their children.

Romantic Relationships

- Romantic relationships, an important part of social life, are essential for well-being and physical health.
- There are many kinds of love, including companionate love, compassionate love, and romantic love.
- According to the *investment model of commitment*, three determinants make partners more committed to each other: satisfaction, few alternative partners, and investments in the relationship. *Perceived partner responsiveness* is associated with greater satisfaction, fewer alternatives, and higher investment.

- Commitment is linked to longer-lasting relationships because it increases relationship-promoting behaviors such as forgiveness and self-sacrifice.
- Predictors of relationship dissatisfaction and divorce include personality and socioeconomic factors, marrying too young, communication issues, and behavioral tendencies such as criticism, stonewalling, defensiveness, contempt, and blame.
- In healthy relationships, couples work on strengthening their bond by capitalizing on the good events in their lives, being playful, and seeing each other’s positive attributes.
- In many cultures around the world, marriages are arranged by the parents, which may have some advantages that Westerners don’t generally realize.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. The need to belong is thought to be a fundamental human drive, similar to physical drives such as hunger. When the need to belong is satisfied, people are unlikely to pursue this drive further. Given this premise, who is more likely to call up a friend to make plans: Betty, who’s been spending lots of quality time with her children lately, or Blanche, who tends to stay home by herself?
2. Sean and Mitch are just starting a relationship, but they seem to have different expectations about what they each deserve from a romantic partner. Sean thinks that if his partner doesn’t treat him extremely well, then that romantic partner is just not worth his time because there are better guys out there. Mitch, on the other hand, has been in several bad relationships and puts up with just about anything from a partner because he’s deeply afraid of being alone. How would you describe Sean and Mitch’s

respective comparison levels and comparison levels for alternatives? What might the consequences of these levels be?

3. Jenny feels comfortable relying on and being close to her immediate family members, and she seeks extremely intimate, clingy romantic relationships. However, she keeps her distance from her friends, not disclosing much to them or counting on them. How would you analyze her attachment styles? How would you describe her working models?
4. Robert has a crush on Marilyn, but she doesn’t seem to know he exists. What can Robert do to make himself more attractive to Marilyn based on the principles of proximity and similarity?
5. Suppose Alice wants to try an experiment about the halo effect of physical attractiveness on an online dating website. She sets up two profiles for herself, making the content of the profiles identical except for her picture. On one profile, she uses a beautiful photo of herself as her profile photo, but on the other profile, she uses a horrible photo of herself. How might men respond to these two profiles, and how might Alice be expected to respond to them in turn?
6. How can the investment model of commitment help explain why people stay in long-term abusive relationships? How might an abusive partner manipulate the factors that contribute to commitment to make an abuse victim stay in the relationship?

The answer guidelines for the Think About It questions can be found at the back of the book . . .

ONLINE STUDY MATERIALS

Want to earn a better grade on your test?

Go to **INQUIZITIVE** to learn and review this chapter’s content, with personalized feedback along the way.

CHAPTER
10

Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Discrimination

I CAN'T BREATHE!
STOP Racist Police Terror

Why has violence toward and mistreatment of Black Americans persisted in the United States?

NSP
COSTA RICA
ails Maui

To what extent are people’s identities derived from the groups to which they belong?

HOPE
CHANGE WE CAN BELIEVE

When does the success of people like Oprah and the Obama family change a prejudiced person’s negative perceptions of people of color—and when does it not?

OUTLINE

- Characterizing Intergroup Bias
- The Economic Perspective
- The Motivational Perspective
- The Cognitive Perspective
- Reducing Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination

ACTS OF PREJUDICE AND discrimination against Asian Americans have risen dramatically in the United States since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, leaving many

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) afraid—even in some of the nation’s most diverse cities. Some of these acts have been shockingly violent, such as the March 2021 shootings by a White gunman in and around several spas in the Atlanta area that killed eight people, six of them women of Asian descent. Other incidents have been on a smaller scale, but no less traumatic, including brazen physical attacks on elderly people of Asian descent in New York City and cities across California. Recent surveys indicate that the majority of AAPI hate incidents have involved forms of verbal harassment, but 14 percent have involved physical assault, 8.5 percent being coughed or spat on, and 11 percent civil rights violations (Yellow Horse et al., 2021). The Stop AAPI Hate Coalition—launched on March 19, 2020, in response to the alarming escalation of AAPI-directed racism in that month alone—received more than 9,000 reports of hate incidents against AAPIs in the United States between March 2020 and June 2021. In San Francisco, where AAPIs make up over a third of the population, city police reported a 567 percent increase in AAPI hate incidents from 2020 to 2021 (San Francisco Police Department Media Relations Unit, 2022).

It’s no surprise that AAPI prejudice and discrimination have skyrocketed in recent years. Starting in early March 2020, prominent Republican leaders, including then-president Donald Trump, made public statements linking the COVID-19 outbreak to China, referring to the virus as the “China virus” and “Kung Flu” and declaring outright that the virus was China’s fault. A study analyzing tweets from March 9 to March 23, 2020, which corresponded to the week before and the week after Trump tweeted the phrase “China virus,” examined the extent to which the neutral hashtag *#covid19* and the inflammatory hashtag *#chinavirus* were associated with anti-Asian sentiment (Hswen et al., 2021). Throughout the study period as a whole, one-fifth of the tweets associated with #covid19 conveyed anti-Asian sentiment, as did more than 50 percent of the tweets associated with #chinavirus. More tellingly, the increase from the first week to the second in the number of anti-Asian tweets associated with #chinavirus was 22 times greater than the increase in tweets associated with #covid19.

Though AAPI hate incidents in the United States have intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, several periods of amplified anti-Asian racism have occurred in U.S. history—dating back to the mid-1800s, when Chinese immigrants started arriving and working in large numbers on projects such as the transcontinental railroad. In both its past and present forms, anti-Asian racism in the United States illustrates many of the theories and research studies we cover in this and the next chapter on the underlying causes of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. For example, illustrating the role of economic factors in prejudice and discrimination, non-Asian workers in the mid-1800s saw Chinese laborers as a threat to their livelihood—a threat they deemed “the yellow peril”—because the Chinese were willing to work for lower wages and thus were taking jobs that might otherwise have gone to non-Asian laborers. Other forms of supposed threat can also fuel prejudice and discrimination. The Japanese internment camps, where the federal government detained over 120,000 Japanese Americans shortly after Japan’s bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1942, offer a stark example of anti-Asian discrimination driven by the perceived threat of citizens of Japanese descent acting as spies for the country of Japan. And during the past few years, some have come to imagine Asians as posing a threat once more, this time by creating and spreading a deadly virus.

(A)

(B)

!STOP ASIAN HATE
STOP ASIAN HATE
LOVE NOT HATE
Stop Asian
STOP
#STOP ASIAN HATE
STOP ASIAN HATE
#STOP ASIAN HATE
Wah Ying

(C)

ANTI-ASIAN RACISM IN THE UNITED STATES Several periods of amplified anti-Asian racism have occurred in U.S. history: (A) During the mid-1800s, non-Asian laborers saw Chinese railroad workers as a threat to their livelihood, and (B) after Japan’s surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in 1942, the U.S. government sent Japanese Americans to internment camps because of the perceived threat of citizens of Japanese descent acting as spies for the country of Japan. (C) Most recently, hate incidents against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, in large part because of rhetoric about China being the origin of the virus.

In May 2021, President Joe Biden signed a law making it easier for people to report AAPI hate incidents at the state and local levels (e.g., by providing online reporting resources in multiple languages). The law also enhanced the U.S. Department of Justice’s ability to respond to these incidents. The Stop AAPI Hate Coalition praised the legislation as a good step toward addressing the rise in anti-Asian discrimination and hate, but it underscored the need for additional steps to address the root causes of systemic racism against AAPIs. Although laws can decrease discrimination by making such behavior illegal, stereotypes and prejudice involve beliefs and emotions that are far harder, if not impossible, to legislate, in no small part because they often bias people’s judgments and decisions automatically, without their awareness.

In this chapter, we explore what stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination are and how they form the basis of intergroup bias. We then examine three broad perspectives—economic, motivational, and cognitive—on the underlying causes of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. We end with a close look at social psychological approaches to reducing prejudice. Throughout, you will see that many of the chapter’s empirical examples focus on stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against particular racial or ethnic groups (e.g., Black Americans), reflecting the emphasis of most research on this topic. Most also rely on WEIRD samples (i.e., samples obtained from people from Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic countries; see Chapter 2). Nonetheless, there is ample reason to believe that most of the theories covered here account for stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination against many types of groups, including those reflecting gender, sexual orientation, social class, political ideology, or disability status. And, certainly, people the world over exhibit stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, although the specific forms they take and the specific groups they target often depend on cultural context. ■

Characterizing Intergroup Bias

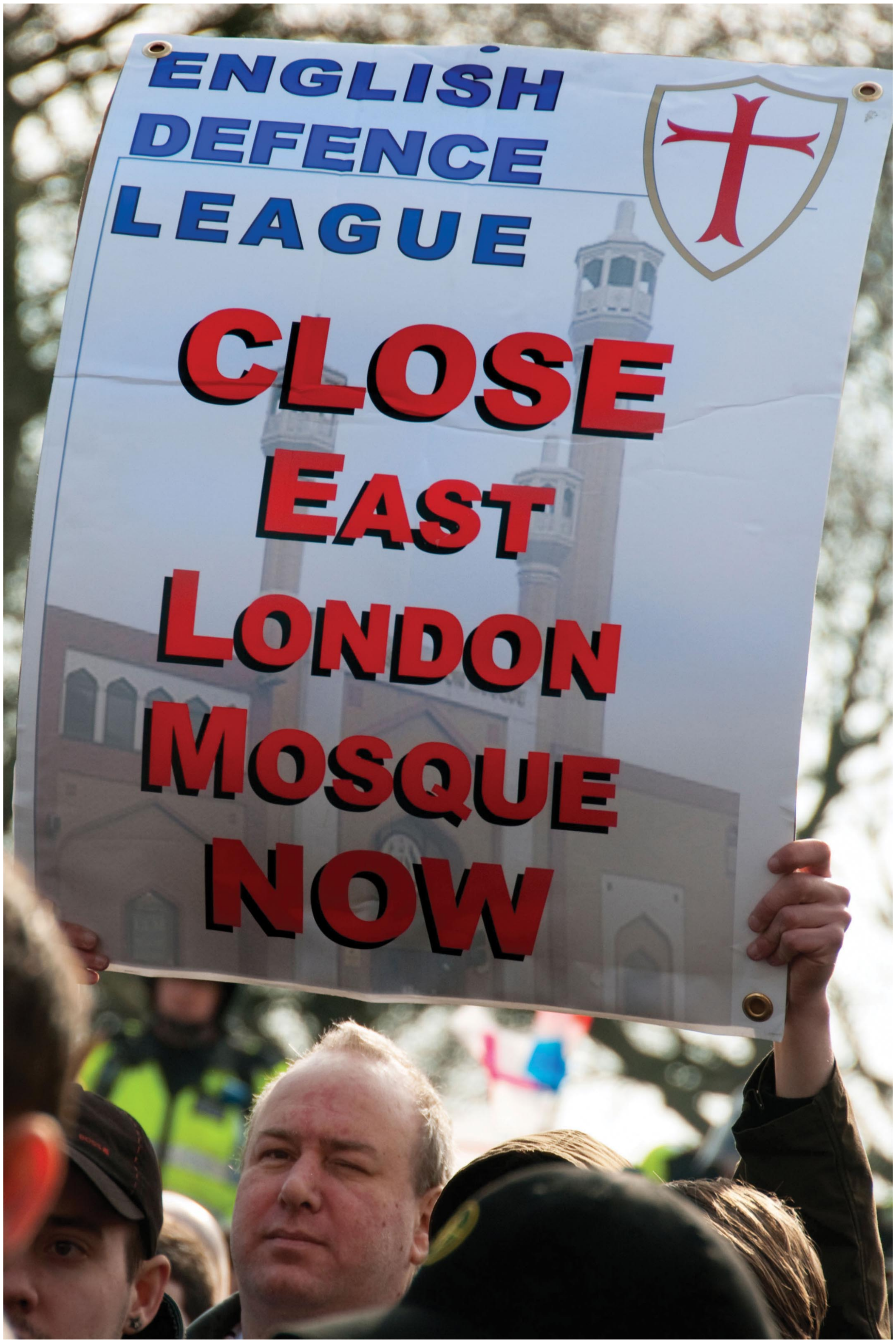
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Distinguish among stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination.
- Explain the defining features of modern and ambivalent forms of prejudice.
- Describe explicit and implicit ways to measure stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, including the implicit association test.

Do you believe that Asians are conscientious, Italians are temperamental, Muslims are fanatical, or that Californians are “laid back”? Such beliefs are examples of stereotypes—beliefs that certain attributes are characteristic of members of particular groups. Stereotyping is a way of categorizing people (Y. Lee, Jussim, & McCauley, 1995). It involves thinking about a person not as an individual, but as a member of a group, and projecting your beliefs about the group onto that person.

POLICE
STOP

(A)


ENGLISH
DEFENCE
LEAGUE
CLOSE
EAST
LONDON
MOSQUE
NOW

(B)

VOICE
VICTIMS OF IMMIGRATION CRIME ENGAGEMENT
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

(C)

SEEDS OF INTERGROUP BIAS (A) The stereotype of African Americans being more likely than other groups to break the law, combined with anti-Black sentiment, can lead to discriminatory behavior, such as police officers pulling over African American drivers in wildly disproportionate numbers. (B) The stereotype linking Islam with extremism can lead to negative reactions toward Muslims and Islamic institutions. (C) The Trump administration created the Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement (VOICE) office to publicize the plight of victims of crimes committed by undocumented immigrants, thereby highlighting immigrant crime but not the same crimes committed by U.S. citizens.

Stereotypes can be positive or negative, largely true or entirely false. Take the stereotype that the Swiss are punctual or that the Germans make great automobiles. Swiss trains are in fact renowned for being on time, and automobile magazines probably do rave more about the cars rolling off the assembly lines at German carmakers BMW and Audi than those at, say, the French carmakers Peugeot and Renault. Some stereotypes are accurate.

But stereotypes about Swiss people and German cars are not what concern most social psychologists (Judd & Park, 1993). They've focused instead on those stereotypes that are most likely to lead to pernicious forms of prejudice and discrimination.

Prejudice refers to an attitudinal and affective response toward a group and its individual members. Negative attitudes generally get the most attention, but it's also possible to be positively prejudiced toward a group. Prejudice involves *prejudging* others because they belong to a specific category. Discrimination refers to favorable or unfavorable *actions* directed toward members of a group. It involves unfair treatment of others based not on their individual character or abilities but strictly on their group membership.

Roughly speaking, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination refer to the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, respectively, that drive relationships between groups. The three often go together. People are more inclined to injure those they hold in low regard. But these components of intergroup bias don't *have* to occur together. For example, it's possible (and common) to be prejudiced without engaging in discrimination, if only to avoid social or legal repercussions. On the flip side, a person can also discriminate without prejudice. Jewish parents sometimes say they don't want their children to marry outside the faith, not because they have a low opinion of other groups but because they're concerned about assimilation with non-Jews and its implications for the future of Judaism. Thus, ingroup favoritism can arise even when there isn't any hostility toward different outgroups. Sometimes, of course, statements such as "I have nothing against them, but . . ." merely cover up underlying bigotry. At other times, they are truly sincere and don't reflect any bad intent—but they can cause insult and injury nonetheless (L. Gaertner et al., 2006; Lowery et al., 2006).

Contemporary Prejudice

Research on prejudice and discrimination over the past 40 years has been greatly influenced by the fact that throughout much of the world, norms about how different groups are viewed and treated have changed. In Western countries in particular, it’s now illegal to engage in many forms of discrimination that were common half a century ago, and it’s no longer socially acceptable to express the sorts of prejudices and stereotypes that were widespread (and brazenly open) until relatively recently. These changes have meant that, today, some people will experience conflict between what they truly think and feel and what they think they *should* think and feel (or what they believe is prudent to say or do publicly). Many others experience conflict between competing beliefs and values (such as a belief in equal treatment for all but also a desire to make up for past injustices toward historically marginalized groups with affirmative action). Similarly, some experience conflict between abstract beliefs and gut-level reactions (such as a belief that one should feel the same toward all people but also some hard-to-shake resistance to that belief). In addition, research has shown that some responses to members of other groups are nonconscious and automatic and may differ considerably from people’s more thought-out and explicit beliefs and attitudes. These kinds of conflicts have inspired social psychologists to develop new theories to explain this more modern, more constrained, more conflicted sort of prejudice (Dovidio, 2001).

This shift in theoretical approaches is particularly noteworthy with respect to race relations in the United States. Although subtler forms of racism may be the most common today and therefore have attracted abundant research attention from social psychologists (Kinder & Sears, 1981;

McConahay, 1986; Sears, 1988; Sears & Henry, 2005; Sears & Kinder, 1985; see also Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 1993, on homophobia; and Swim et al., 1995, on sexism), it is critically important not to lose sight of the fact that old-fashioned racism is not dead. In fact, White supremacist groups in the United States appear to be growing in strength and numbers, as are various like-minded ethno-nationalist groups in Europe and around the world—all of whom display their prejudice openly if not brazenly. There is nothing subtle about Islamic extremist groups killing “apostates” and claiming that they’re serving Allah when they do so. Nor is there anything subtle about the fact that in some U.S. states, on the night that Barack Obama was elected president in 2008, there were more internet searches for “[n-word] president” than for “first Black president” (Stephens-Davidowitz, 2017). The number of hate crimes in the United States has increased over the past decade, not only against AAPIs, as noted at the beginning of the chapter, but also against LGBTQ and Hispanic individuals. Attacks against Muslims also remain frequent. All of these examples serve as salient reminders that although subtler forms of prejudice may be more prevalent today, more virulent old-fashioned forms of prejudice have not gone away and, in some cases, may even be growing (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2022). We will address some of the current thinking on the causes of these disturbing trends in the next chapter. Here, we focus on research that addresses the subtler, more conflicted types of racism that are prevalent throughout most of the developed world today.

In their theory of modern racism, Sam Gaertner and Jack Dovidio (1986; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004) have tried to capture the essence of the conflicts and inconsistencies many White people experience in thinking about race. According to this theory, although White people may reject explicitly racist beliefs (for example, that Black people are morally inferior to White people), they nevertheless feel animosity toward Black people or are highly suspicious of them and uncomfortable dealing with them. Gaertner and Dovidio note that many people hold strong egalitarian values that lead them to reject prejudice and discrimination, yet they also harbor unacknowledged negative feelings and attitudes toward other racial and ethnic groups that stem from ingroup favoritism and a desire to defend the status quo (Kteily, Sidanius, & Levin, 2011; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Whether these individuals will express prejudice or discriminate depends on the situation. If they can’t identify a justification or “disguise” for discriminatory action, their responses will conform to their egalitarian values. But if they sense, even nonconsciously, that a suitable rationalization is available, the modern racist’s prejudices will emerge.

In an early test of this idea, White participants were in a position to aid a White or Black person in need of medical assistance (S. L. Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977; see also Dovidio et al., 1997; Saucier, Miller, & Doucet, 2005). If the participants thought they were the only one who could help, they came to the aid of the Black person somewhat more often (94 percent of the time) than the White person (81 percent). But when they thought other people were present and their own inaction could be justified on nonracial grounds (“I thought somebody else with more expertise would intervene”), they helped the Black person much less often than they helped the White person (38 percent versus 75 percent). In situations such as this, the prejudice or discrimination is “masked,” and the individual can remain comfortably unaware of any racist impulses. Thus, modern racism shows itself in subtle ways. The modern racist would never join the Ku Klux Klan but might insist that “discrimination against Blacks is no longer a problem in the United States” or that “over the past few years, Blacks have gotten more economically than they deserve” (these statements are items on the Modern Racism Scale; McConahay, 1986).

In another study, White participants evaluated Black and White applicants to college (Hodson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2002).

Participants all had scores on the Attitudes Toward Blacks Scale that indicated that they were either high or low in explicit prejudice toward Black people. All participants rated White and Black applicants the same when the applicants either excelled on all relevant dimensions (such as SAT scores and grade point average) or were below average on all dimensions. But when the applicants excelled on certain dimensions (for example, high SAT scores) but were below average on others (for example, low GPA), the ratings of prejudiced and unprejudiced participants diverged: The prejudiced participants rated the Black applicants less favorably than did the unprejudiced participants. In the latter case, prejudiced participants could defend their responses as nondiscriminatory by claiming that the dimensions on which the Black applicants fell short were more important than those on which they excelled.

Theories of contemporary prejudice, such as the theory of modern racism, are important because they foreground the contradictions that underpin race relations today. Though they track the undeniable progress that’s been made in the treatment of members of historically marginalized or stigmatized groups, they also highlight subtle forms of prejudice and discrimination that persist and have negative consequences. For example, the fact that explicit egalitarian beliefs are often accompanied by implicit negative attitudes can impose a cognitive burden on members of stigmatized groups when they are interacting with majority-group members (E. R. Carter et al., 2015; Murphy et al., 2012). Because expressions of subtle bias, unlike clear, outright bias, force the targets of the bias to devote cognitive resources to discerning the meaning and intentions of majority-group members’ behavior, they are left with fewer cognitive resources for other activities and tasks.

BOX 10.1

Not So Fast: **Critical Thinking by Finding the Proper Comparison**

Suppose you want to see whether gender stereotypes bias a teacher’s judgments of student work. How would you find out? Researchers have generally used a straightforward approach: They give essays to groups of participants, telling some of them that a given essay was written by, say, John, and others that it was written by Jane. They then ask participants to assess its quality. Of course, it’s important for the researchers to choose the names assigned to the essay carefully. Comparing the ratings of an essay supposedly written by Adolf with those of an essay written by Jennifer wouldn’t work, because there’s so much baggage associated with the name Adolf. How do researchers ensure that the names are comparable? One way is to choose pairs of men’s and women’s names that are as similar as possible—Michael and Michelle, Paul and Paula, Robert and Roberta, and so on. This is precisely what researchers interested in gender bias have done, and what they have found is abundant evidence of sexism. The same essay tends to be rated more favorably when it’s attributed to a man rather than to a woman (Goldberg, 1968). What could be more straightforward and telling?

It turns out that these studies are not so straightforward and informative after all. In fact, when you try to create pairs of men’s and women’s names that are as similar as possible, you can easily end up with a set of men’s names that people tend to like more than the women’s names. The higher ratings given to essays purportedly written by Paul or Robert may not be because they’re thought to be written by men, but because they’re thought to be written by people with more desirable names. These studies, in other words, may showcase *nameism* rather than sexism (that is, in this example people may tend to like the names Paul or Robert more than the names Paula or Roberta). In fact, when the men’s and women’s names are equated in terms of how much participants like them as names, not by how similar they are in other ways (length, phonemic overlap, and so on), there is no effect of the gender of the purported author on how favorably an essay is evaluated (Kasof, 1993).

Does this mean there’s no sexism when it comes to evaluating a person’s performance? Of course not. It just means there may be no sexism when it comes to the evaluation of essays. And that shouldn’t be surprising. Girls are known to perform better than boys in school, especially when it comes to reading and writing, so their work in this context is less likely to suffer from negative stereotyping. But there are other areas in which sexist stereotypes might indeed undermine the evaluation of a woman’s performance. Historically, for example, it was thought that women didn’t have the same musical talent as men, and their performance during auditions for premier orchestras appeared to validate that assessment. But when orchestra directors had musicians audition behind a screen so the performers couldn’t be seen, there was a sharp rise in the percentage of women deemed worthy of positions in the world’s most esteemed orchestras (Goldin & Rouse, 2000).

Moreover, although there may not be any sexism on the part of *individuals* evaluating essays written by men and women, there might nevertheless be *societal* sexism when it comes to how names are created. Nearly all pairs of very similar men’s and women’s names—Paul and Paula, Donald and Donna—result from the woman’s name being derived from the man’s name. Society is apparently more tolerant of derivative women’s names than derivative men’s names (if the latter even exist!). That’s a different kind of sexism, but it’s sexism nonetheless.

What’s especially noteworthy about the research in this area is that the very strategy the investigators used to rule out an alternative interpretation of their results opened the door to an alternative interpretation! What could be more sensible—more seemingly scientific—than to choose men’s and women’s names that were as alike as possible? Who would have thought that doing so would threaten the validity of the study? Research like this serves as a reminder that knowledge is hard won. It also serves as a reminder that selecting the proper comparison is not always as easy as it seems.

“Benevolent” Racism and Sexism

Statements such as “Some of my best friends are ________” (fill in the blank) or “I’m not sexist; I love women!” illustrate a common conviction that stereotypes must be negative to be harmful. In fact, many of our “-isms”—

racism, sexism, ageism, heterosexism—can be ambivalent, containing both negative and positive features (Czopp, Kay, & Cheryan, 2015; Czopp & Monteith, 2006; Devine & Elliot, 1995; Ho & Jackson, 2001). Someone might believe, for example, that Asians are less socially skilled and more rigid than Europeans—and at the same time believe that they are more intellectually gifted. Similarly, someone might believe that women are less analytical than men—and at the same time believe that women are kinder and have better social skills.

“BENEVOLENT” SEXISM This image depicts a man chivalrously opening a car door for a woman. Although the man’s behavior may appear to be benign, if not kind, toward the woman, it may actually reflect his benevolent sexist attitudes toward women. People with such attitudes tend to look favorably on women who conform to gender roles but to derogate those who deviate from them, thereby inhibiting progress toward equality.

In their work on ambivalent sexism, Peter Glick and Susan Fiske (2001a, 2001b) interviewed 15,000 men and women in 19 nations and found that “benevolent” sexism (a chivalrous ideology marked by protectiveness and affection toward women who embrace conventional roles) often coexists with hostile sexism (dislike of nontraditional women and those seen as usurping men’s power). Glick and Fiske argue that even the seemingly positive stereotypes aren’t benign. Ambivalent and benevolent sexist or racist attitudes may be particularly resistant to change. The favorable features of such beliefs enable those who hold them to deny any prejudice. (Think of the man who insists on opening car doors for women.) The positive aspects of ambivalent attitudes can also disarm their targets, making it easy for people to overlook the negative beliefs that come hand in hand with the favorable ones. For example, research suggests that the protectiveness and affection displayed by men high in ambivalent sexism convey a sense of warmth to women that can mask the men’s more hostile sexist beliefs (Hopkins-Doyle et al., 2019).

At a broader societal level, by rewarding women and members of marginalized groups for conforming to the status quo—for acting in ways that are in keeping with the stereotypes about them—benevolent sexism and racism inhibit progress toward equality. In other words, those who hold ambivalent attitudes tend to act positively toward members of outgroups only if those members fulfill their idealized image of what such people should be like—say, the happy housewife or the dutiful staffer bringing coffee. Members of the outgroup who deviate from the stereotype tend to be treated with hostility (G. Lau, Kay, & Spencer, 2008). Finally, it is worth noting that benevolent sexism can be just as damaging as hostile sexism. In one study, for example, women treated in a paternalistic manner (a kind of benevolent sexism) performed worse on a series of cognitive tests compared with their counterparts in a hostile-sexism condition and a no-sexism control condition because of the self-doubts aroused by the treatment they received (Dardenne, Dumont, & Bollier, 2007).

Measuring Attitudes About Groups

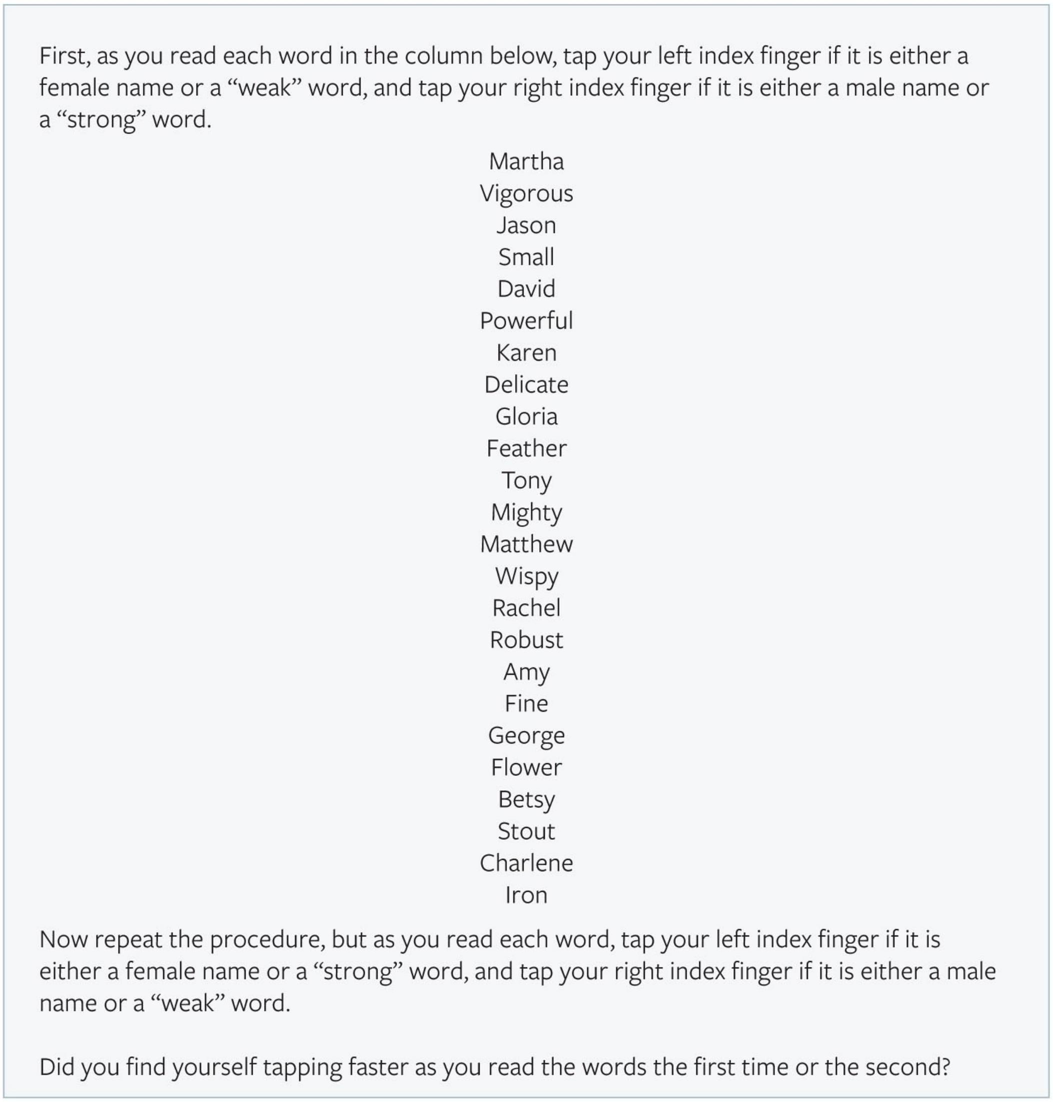
The most straightforward way to assess how people feel about various groups is, of course, to ask them. Researchers do so in two ways. First, researchers may provide survey respondents with a list of trait adjectives and ask them to indicate which ones they believe characterize members of different groups—older adults, wealthy people, Latinos, and so on (Dovidio et al., 1996; Katz & Braly, 1933). Second, researchers have developed various self-report questionnaires that ask respondents about their attitudes and beliefs about members of different groups, including the Attitudes Toward Blacks Scale (Brigham, 1993), the Modern Racism Scale (McConahay, Hardee, & Batts, 1981), the Fraboni Scale of Ageism (Fraboni, Saltstone, & Hughes, 1990), the Sexual Prejudice Scale (Chonody, 2013), and the Attitudes Toward Transgender Men and Women Scale (Billard, 2018).

But surveys of people’s attitudes toward certain groups can’t always be trusted. Respondents may think it’s not acceptable to express what they really feel, or what people report verbally may only be a part of their stance toward members of other groups, and there may be other beliefs or feelings beneath the surface. Given that so many forms of prejudice are ambivalent, uncertain, or hidden—even from the self—they’re not easily tapped through self-reports (C. S. Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). Social psychologists have therefore developed more subtle self-report measures (S. T. Fiske & North, 2015) and created a number of indirect, non-self-report measures of prejudice and stereotyping. We discuss two types here: (1) the implicit association test and (2) different types of priming procedures. (For overviews of a wider set of implicit measurement procedures, see Gawronski & Payne, 2010; S. A. W. Klein & Sherman, in press; Wittenbrink & Schwarz, 2007).

THE IMPLICIT ASSOCIATION TEST (IAT) Anthony Greenwald and Mazarin Banaji (1995) pioneered a technique called the implicit association test (IAT) for revealing subtle, nonconscious biases, even among those who sincerely believe they are bias-free. Here's how the technique works. A series of words or pictures are presented on a computer screen, and the respondent presses a certain key with the left hand if the picture or word conforms to one rule and different key with the right hand if it conforms to another rule. Before you read further, try either the version of the task in **Figure 10.1** or the fully interactive version in the ebook. More IATs featuring a variety of groups are available online at https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/research/.

Greenwald and Banaji argued that respondents would be faster to press one key for members of a particular group and for words stereotypically associated with that group than they would to press the same key for members of that group and for words that *contradict* the stereotype associated with that group. It's easy to respond quickly when members of a group and the attributes associated with them are signaled with the same key rather than different keys.

The same general procedure is used to assess implicit prejudice (rather than stereotyping). In this case, participants press one key for both positive words and photos of people in one group, and they press a different key for both negative words and people in another group. Participants then repeat the procedure with the pairings of the two groups and the positive/negative words switched. A nonconscious prejudice toward older people, for example, would be captured by a difference between the average time it takes to respond to older faces/positive words and the average time it takes to respond to older faces/negative words. Someone with negative views toward older adults would take longer to respond to older faces/positive words than they would to older faces/negative words (Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2005).



First, as you read each word in the column below, tap your left index finger if it is either a female name or a “weak” word, and tap your right index finger if it is either a male name or a “strong” word.

Martha
Vigorous
Jason
Small
David
Powerful
Karen
Delicate
Gloria
Feather
Tony
Mighty
Matthew
Wispy
Rachel
Robust
Amy
Fine
George
Flower
Betsy
Stout
Charlene
Iron

Now repeat the procedure, but as you read each word, tap your left index finger if it is either a female name or a “strong” word, and tap your right index finger if it is either a male name or a “weak” word.

Did you find yourself tapping faster as you read the words the first time or the second?

FIGURE 10.1 **THE IMPLICIT ASSOCIATION TEST: TRY IT OUT ON YOURSELF**

Millions of people have taken the IAT online. Among other results, researchers have found that both young and older individuals show a pronounced prejudice in favor of the young over the old, and about two-thirds of White respondents show a strong or moderate prejudice for White over Black faces or names (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002). About half of all Black respondents also show some pro-White prejudice.

Although the test has its critics (Blanton & Jaccard, 2008; Oswald et al., 2013; Roddy, Stewart, & Barnes-Holmes, 2010), there’s evidence that IAT responses correlate with other indirect measures of prejudice (Lane et al., 2007; Rudman & Ashmore, 2007). In one study, participants in a brain-imaging machine viewed pictures of Black faces and White faces. The participants’ earlier IAT responses to Black faces were significantly correlated with heightened neural activity in the amygdala (a brain region associated with fear and emotional learning) in response to the Black faces. Their scores on a more traditional, conscious measure of prejudice, the Modern Racism Scale, were not correlated with this difference in neural activity, suggesting that the IAT assessed an important component of participants’ attitudes that they were unable or unwilling to articulate (Phelps et al., 2000).

An important question, however, is whether a person’s responses on the IAT are predictive of behavior that’s more significant than pressing computer keys (Amodio & Devine, 2006; Brendl, Markman, & Messner, 2001; Greenwald, Poehlman, et al., 2009; Karpinski & Hilton, 2001). In one study addressing this question, participants interacted with a White experimenter, took the IAT, and then interacted with a Black experimenter. The participants’ IAT scores predicted the discrepancy between how much they spoke to the White versus the Black experimenter, how often they smiled at the White versus the Black experimenter, and the number of speech errors and hesitations they exhibited when interacting with the White versus the Black experimenter (McConnell & Leibold, 2001).

Exactly when IAT scores are likely to predict meaningful behavior is part of the controversy surrounding the test (e.g., Oswald et al., 2013), as is the question of how strongly predictive people’s IAT scores are (Greenwald, Banaji, & Nosek, 2015; Oswald et al., 2015). One tentative answer to these important questions is that it depends on the degree of correspondence between the specific attitudes assessed by an IAT and the exact behavior of interest (Irving & Smith, 2020; Jost, 2019; Meissner et al., 2019; see also Chapter 6 on the extent to which measured attitudes can predict behavior). People’s behavior toward migrant farm workers is likely to be predicted better by an IAT assessment of implicit attitudes toward such workers than by an IAT assessment of implicit attitudes toward Latin Americans or immigrants in general.

PRIMING AND IMPLICIT PREJUDICE Social psychologists have also used priming (mental activation) procedures (see Chapter 4) to measure prejudices that people might not know they have or may wish to deny. The logic is simple: If I show you the word *butter* and then ask you to tell me, as quickly as you can, whether a subsequent string of letters is a word, you’ll recognize that *bread* is a word (rather than a string of letters or a nonsense word) more quickly than you’ll recognize that *car* is a word because of your preexisting association between bread and butter. Similarly, if you associate nuns with virtue and charity, you’re likely to be faster to say that positive terms (*good*, *benevolent*, *trustworthy*) are words after seeing a picture of a nun. But if you have negative associations with nuns, you’re likely to respond more quickly to negative terms (*mean*, *unhappy*, *unbending*) after seeing a picture of a nun.

As shown in **Figure 10.2**, an implicit measure of prejudice can thus be derived by comparing a person’s average reaction time to real and made-up words that are positive or negative in valence when preceded by faces of members of a given category (compared with control trials in which positive and negative words are preceded by faces of people not in that category). As discussed later in this chapter, numerous studies using these priming methods have shown that people who are sure they aren’t prejudiced against Black people nonetheless respond more quickly to negative words preceded by pictures of Black faces and more slowly to positive words preceded by pictures of Black faces (Banaji, Hardin, & Rothman, 1993; Bessenoff &

Sherman, 2000; Dijksterhuis et al., 2000; Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Fazio & Hilden, 2001; Friese, Hofmann, & Schmitt, 2008; Gawronski et al., 2010). One shouldn’t assume that people are lying when they deny such prejudices: They may simply not have conscious access to many of their true attitudes and beliefs.

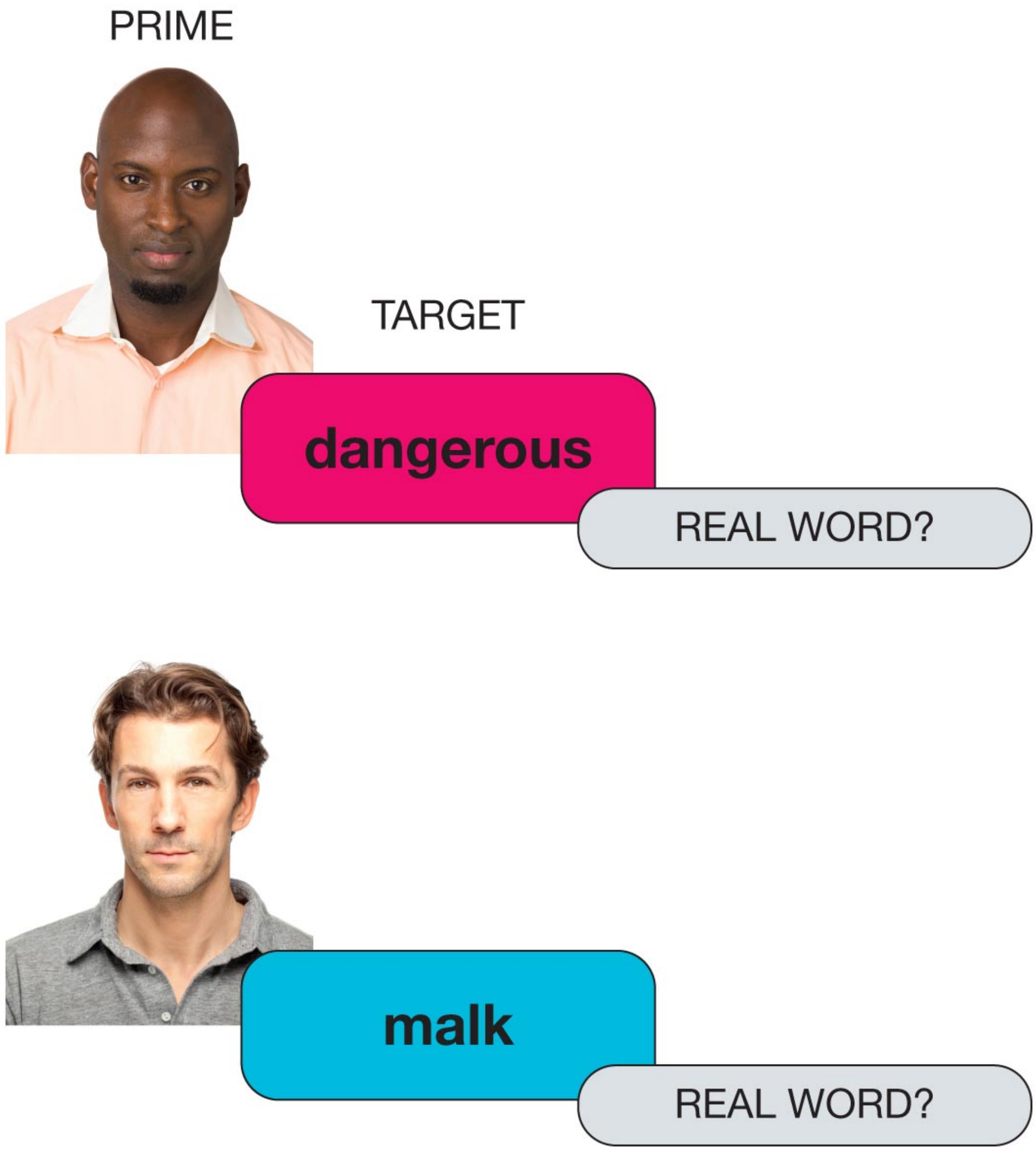


FIGURE 10.2 **AN AFFECTIVE PRIMING PARADIGM** People are faster to identify real words (rather than made-up words) after seeing pictures of members of a given group if they associate those real words with that group. In this

> example, someone with negative associations about Black people would be faster to recognize “dangerous” as a real word than they would be to recognize a positive word such as “generous” after seeing a Black person’s face.

A variant of this sort of priming procedure, the affect misattribution procedure (AMP), measures how people evaluate a stimulus after a given prime instead of how quickly they respond to it (Payne et al., 2005). In the AMP, subjects are shown a picture of a member of a particular target group—such as a prototypical Muslim, transgender person, or executive—which is immediately followed by a neutral or unfamiliar image, such as a belt buckle or a Chinese pictograph. The key question is whether the feelings associated with the target group (for example, Muslims) transfer to the subjects’ evaluations of the subsequent, otherwise neutral image (for example, a Chinese pictograph). If a person has negative associations with Muslims, the average rating of Chinese pictographs that appear after images of Muslims should be lower than the average rating of pictographs that follow non-Muslim faces. Responses on the AMP have been shown to be related to political attitudes, other measures of racial bias, and significant personal habits like smoking and drinking (Greenwald, Smith, et al., 2009; Payne et al., 2005; Payne, Govorun, & Arbuckle, 2008; Payne, McClernon, & Dobbins, 2007).

LOOKING BACK

Although virulent forms of racism and ethno-nationalism still exist today, prejudice and discrimination are frowned upon throughout much of today’s Western world. This trend has led to an explicit rejection of prejudiced attitudes that nonetheless can be accompanied by subtle and often nonconscious discriminatory behavior. The schism between what people consciously maintain and how they sometimes feel or act has led to the development of various indirect measures of beliefs and attitudes about different groups. These include the implicit association test and priming procedures, which measure the degree to which different groups trigger positive or negative associations.

Glossary

stereotype
A belief that certain attributes are characteristic of members of a particular group.

prejudice
An attitude or affective response (positive or negative) toward a group and its individual members.

discrimination
Favorable or unfavorable treatment of individuals based on their membership in a particular group.

modern racism
Prejudice directed at racial groups that exists alongside the rejection of explicitly racist beliefs.

implicit association test (IAT)
A technique for revealing nonconscious attitudes toward different stimuli, particularly groups of people.

priming
The presentation of information designed to activate a concept and hence make it accessible. A prime is the stimulus presented to activate the concept in question.

affect misattribution procedure (AMP)
A priming procedure designed to assess people’s implicit associations to different stimuli, including their associations to various ethnic, racial, gender, and occupational groups.

The Economic Perspective

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe how realistic group conflict theory explains the existence of prejudice.
- Explain how superordinate goals may help reduce intergroup hostility and competition.

The pervasiveness of stereotypes and the persistence of ethnic, religious, and racial animosity challenge us to understand the underlying causes of intergroup tension. Where do stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination come from? Why do they persist? What can be done to eliminate or reduce their impact?

Any serious attempt to address these questions must begin with the recognition that there will likely never be a single, comprehensive theory of the causes of stereotyping, prejudice, or discrimination. Their causes are many and varied, and any satisfactory account of these intertwined phenomena must incorporate numerous elements. This chapter focuses on three general perspectives that shed light on these issues. The *economic perspective* identifies the roots of intergroup hostility in competing interests that can pit groups against each other. The *motivational perspective* emphasizes the psychological needs that lead to intergroup conflict. The *cognitive perspective* traces the origins of stereotyping to the same cognitive processes that enable people to categorize, say, items of furniture into distinct classes of chairs, couches, and tables. This perspective takes into account the frequent conflict between people’s consciously held beliefs and values and their quick, reflexive, sometimes subconscious reactions to members of other groups.

Note that these three perspectives are exactly that—*perspectives*, not sharply defined categories. They’re also not competing accounts but rather are complementary elements of a more complete analysis. These three elements often influence one another. Take, for example, victims of genocide. Jews, expatriate Chinese, and Armenians have all been the victims of genocide. The reasons in each case were partly economic, as these groups were richer than many others in their countries. This economic element may then have driven the cognitive element, which caused people to perceive these groups as fundamentally different from themselves. The cognitive element in turn may have fed into the motivational element of anger over the wealth obtained by prominent members of these groups. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that these processes necessarily happen in a precise order. For example, seeing these groups as different from the mainstream might have made it easier for people to notice and resent their wealth and to focus on the wealthy members of these groups. Certainly, the three elements tend to be tightly intertwined. Nevertheless, the distinctions between the economic, motivational, and cognitive perspectives are useful insofar as they help us organize and think clearly about the varied causes of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination—and about ways that intergroup conflict might be reduced. Let’s examine these groups of perspectives in turn, starting with economic perspectives.

Realistic Group Conflict Theory

Not surprisingly, some of the most intense intergroup tensions arise between groups that are vying for the same limited resources. Israelis and Palestinians claim ownership of much of the same small strip of land, and, to put it mildly, they have difficulty getting along. Immigrants to the United

States, especially those from Mexico and Central America, face some of the harshest discrimination from those U.S. citizens who see them as threats to their own jobs. Filipino, Sri Lankan, and African guest workers in rich Persian Gulf countries like Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have been known to quarrel with one another and to “stick to their own kind.” These observations highlight the core tenets of the economic perspective on prejudice and discrimination: Groups develop prejudices about each other and discriminate against one another when they compete for material resources.

One version of the economic perspective has been called realistic group conflict theory because it acknowledges that groups sometimes confront real conflict over economic issues (Esses, Jackson, & Bennett-AbuAyyash, 2010; LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Mangum, 2019). According to this theory, prejudice and discrimination often arise from competition over limited resources. The theory predicts, correctly, that prejudice and discrimination should increase under conditions of economic difficulty, such as recessions and periods of high unemployment (E. B. King, Knight, & Hebl, 2010; Krosch & Amodio, 2014; Rodeheffer, Hill, & Lord, 2012; A. A. Vaughn, Cronan, & Beavers, 2015). When there’s less to go around or when people are afraid of losing what they have, competition intensifies.

> “Without knowledge of the roots of hostility we cannot hope to employ our intelligence effectively in controlling its destructiveness.”
>
> —GORDON ALLPORT

The theory also predicts that prejudice and discrimination should be strongest among groups that stand to lose the most from another group’ s economic advance. For example, working-class White Americans exhibited the most anti-Black prejudice in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement (G. E. Simpson & Yinger, 1985; Vanneman & Pettigrew, 1972). Blue-collar jobs were most at risk once millions of Black Americans were allowed to compete more freely for entry-level manufacturing jobs with companies that had previously excluded them. Similarly, Donald Trump’ s efforts during the 2016 presidential campaign to depict immigrants as threats to American jobholders resonated most strongly among White voters in communities experiencing hard times economically (Cohn, 2016; see also Filindra & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2013).

Realistic group conflict theory has been expanded to address the fact that groups often compete not just for material resources but also over ideology and cultural supremacy (Esses et al., 2010; Stephan, Ybarra, & Morrison, 2009; Yong et al., 2021). Groups fight over whose God should be worshipped, what values should be taught, and what should (and shouldn’ t) be permissible on television and on the internet. The theory also specifies some of the ways group conflict plays out. First of all, a pronounced ethnocentrism develops—that is, the other group is vilified and one’ s own group is glorified. Anyone who has ever played pickup basketball knows this phenomenon well. An opponent whose antics seem intolerable instantly becomes more likable once that person becomes a teammate. More generally, people in the outgroup are often thought of in stereotyped ways and are treated in a manner normally forbidden by one’ s moral code. At the same time, loyalty to the ingroup intensifies, and a “circle the wagons” mentality develops. For example, in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, many people reported that individuals across different ethnic and racial groups in the United States seemed to pull together more than they had beforehand. In an experimental investigation of this tendency, telling White students that the attacks were directed at all Americans, regardless of race and class, served to reduce prejudice toward Black Americans (Dovidio et al., 2004).

The Robbers Cave Experiment

A group of researchers explored the ethnocentrism that results from intergroup competition in one of social psychology’ s classic studies. In 1954, Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues carried out an ambitious experiment far from the confines of the psychology laboratory (Sherif et al., 1961). Twenty-two fifth-grade boys were taken to Robbers Cave State Park in southeastern Oklahoma (so named because the outlaws Belle Starr and Jesse James supposedly hid there). The boys had signed up for a two-and-a-half-week summer camp experience that, unbeknownst to them, was also a study of intergroup relationships. The research team spent more than 300 hours screening boys from the Oklahoma City area to find 22 who were not unusual in any way: None had problems in school, all were from intact middle-class families, and there were no notable ethnic group differences among them. The boys, none of whom knew each other beforehand, were divided into two groups of 11 and taken to separate areas of the park. Neither group even knew of the other’ s existence—initially.

COMPETITION AND INTERGROUP CONFLICT In the first phase of the experiment, the two groups independently engaged in activities designed to foster group unity (pitching tents, preparing meals) and took part in such common camp activities as playing baseball, swimming, and putting on skits. Cohesion developed within each group. One group of boys named themselves the Eagles, and the other named themselves the Rattlers.

In the second phase, the researchers brought the Eagles and Rattlers together for a tournament. Each member of the winning team would receive a medal and a highly coveted pocketknife (a reward that researchers would certainly not hand out to young boys today). Members of the losing team would get nothing. The tournament lasted five days and consisted of such activities as baseball, touch football, tug-of-war, cabin inspections, and a treasure hunt. The competitive nature of the tournament was designed to encourage each group to see the other as an obstacle to obtaining the reward and hence as a foe. And that’s exactly what happened.

From the very first competitive encounter, and with increasing frequency throughout the tournament, the two groups hurled insults at each other, calling those in the other group “bums,” “cowards,” “stinkers,” and so on. Although such terms may be tame by today’s trash-talking standards, they are clearly not terms of endearment, and they differed markedly from the self-glorifying and congratulatory comments the boys made about members of their own group. Expressions of intergroup hostility, moreover, weren’t limited to words. The Eagles captured and burned the Rattlers’ flag, which naturally led to a retaliatory theft of the Eagles’ flag. Food fights broke out in the dining area, the groups raided each other’s cabins, and they issued challenges to engage in physical fights.

(A)

(B)

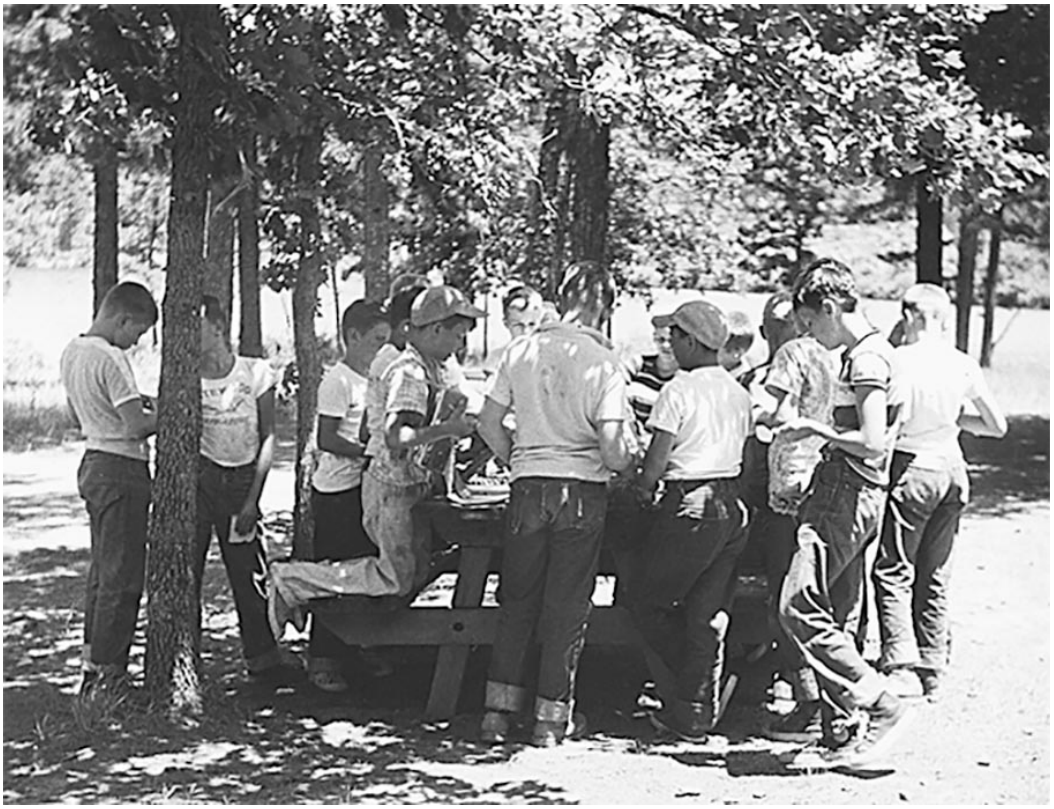
COMPETITION IN THE ROBBERS CAVE EXPERIMENT Two groups of fifth-graders participated in a study that examined intergroup competition and cooperation. (A) During an early phase of the study, the two groups competed against each other, as in this tug-of-war contest. (B) This competition led to numerous acts of aggression—the groups raided each other’ s cabins, called one another names, and stole things from one another, as shown here with the Rattlers showing off a pair of pants they stole from a member of the Eagles. Source: Sherif et al., 1961.

REDUCING INTERGROUP CONFLICT THROUGH SUPERORDINATE GOALS The third and final part of the experiment is in many ways the most important because it dealt with how to reduce the conflict between the two groups. On seven occasions over the two days after the competition was over, the researchers simply brought the two groups together in various noncompetitive settings to see whether their hostility would dissipate. It didn’t. Simple contact between the two groups just led to more name-calling, jeering, food fights, and insults.

Given that simple noncompetitive contact failed to reduce hostility between the two groups, the investigators next tried confronting the boys with a number of crises that could be resolved only through the cooperative efforts of both groups. For example, the water supply to the camp was disrupted, and the entire length of pipe from the reservoir to the campgrounds had to be inspected to find the source of the problem—a task made much more manageable if the boys in both groups were assigned to inspect different segments of the line together. In another example, a truck carrying supplies for a campout at a distant area of the park mysteriously “broke down,” and the boys were instructed to try to get it running again. The investigators left a large section of rope near the truck, hoping the boys might try to pull the truck to get it started. One of the boys said, “Let’s get our tug-of-war rope and have a tug-of-war against the truck.” In doing so, members of both groups intermingled throughout the length of rope and pulled it together.

Relations between the two groups quickly showed the effects of these superordinate goals—goals that could only be achieved by both groups working together. Name-calling abruptly dropped off, and friendships between members of the two groups developed. When the study was completed, the boys insisted that everyone return to Oklahoma City on the same bus rather than on the separate buses on which they had arrived. And when the bus pulled over at a roadside diner, the Rattlers (who had won $5 in an additional competitive event held after the main tournament) decided to spend their money on malted milks for everyone, Eagles included. (Yes, $5 could buy a lot of malted milks in 1954.) The hostility produced by five days of competition was erased by the joint pursuit of common goals. In short, a happy ending (see Box 10.2).

(A)



(B)

COOPERATION IN THE ROBBERS CAVE EXPERIMENT To study ways of diminishing intergroup conflict, Sherif and his research team engineered a number of crises that could be overcome only if the two groups worked together. (A) Here the boys pulled a stalled truck, something that could be done only if everyone pitched in. (B) Working together on these superordinate goals led the two groups of boys to set aside their differences and become friends.

BOX 10.2

FOCUS ON EDUCATION

The “Jigsaw” Classroom

The school classroom can often be a competitive place where students try to outdo one another for the top grades, which is not the type of environment that is most conducive to building intergroup harmony and acceptance. But what would happen if the classroom were made less competitive? Might a more cooperative learning environment improve academic performance and intergroup relations in integrated settings?

Social psychologist Elliot Aronson developed a cooperative learning procedure to find out. When the public school system in Austin, Texas, was integrated in 1971, the transition was not smooth. A disturbing number of physical confrontations took place among Black, Hispanic, and White children, and the atmosphere in the classrooms was not what proponents of integration had hoped it would be. The superintendent of schools invited Aronson to do something to improve matters. Mindful of the lessons of the Robbers Cave experiment, Aronson wanted to institute procedures that would unite students in the common goal of mastering a body of material rather than encourage them to compete for the highest grades and the teachers’ attention. He and his colleagues came up with something called the “jigsaw” classroom (E. Aronson et al., 1978; E. Aronson & Thibodeau, 1992).

In the jigsaw classroom, students are divided into small groups of about six students each. Every effort is made to balance the groups in terms of ethnicity, gender, ability level, leadership, and so on. The material on a given topic is then divided into six parts, and each student is required to master one part (and only one part) and teach it to the others. For a lesson on Barack Obama, for example, one student might be responsible for his early life in Hawaii and Indonesia, another for his years in college and law school, a third for his historic presidential campaign, a fourth for his time in the White House, and so on. By dividing the material in this way, Aronson ensured that no student could learn the entire lesson without help from peers. Each student’s material must, like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, fit together with all the others’ in order for everyone in the group to learn the whole lesson.

The students’ dependence on one another dampens the usual competitive atmosphere and encourages them to work cooperatively toward a common goal. To the extent that the groups are ethnically heterogeneous, members of different ethnic groups gain the experience of working together as individuals rather than as representatives of particular ethnic groups.

The effectiveness of this approach has been assessed in field experiments comparing students in jigsaw classrooms with those in classrooms that teach the same material in the usual fashion. These studies have typically found that students in the jigsaw classrooms like school more, perform better, and develop more positive attitudes toward different ethnic groups than students in traditional classrooms do (Roseth, Johnson, & Johnson, 2008; Slavin, 1995; Stanczak et al., 2020).

Thus, the lesson learned from the Robbers Cave experiment—that intergroup hostility can be diminished by cooperative activity directed at a superordinate goal—has profound practical significance. A simple classroom procedure derived from the lesson—one that can be used in conjunction with traditional, more individualistic classroom exercises—can boost academic performance and facilitate positive relationships across racial and ethnic groups.

The Robbers Cave experiment offers several important lessons. One is that neither differences in background nor differences in appearance nor a prior history of conflict are necessary for intergroup hostility to develop. All that’s required is that two groups enter into competition over rewards that only one can attain. Another lesson is that competition against outsiders often increases group cohesion. This tendency is often exploited by political demagogues who invoke the threat of outside enemies to try to stamp out dissension or to deflect attention from problems or conflict within the group itself. The final lesson points to how intergroup conflict can be diminished. To reduce the hostility between certain groups, policy makers should think of ways to get them to work together to fulfill common goals. Simply putting adversaries together “to get to know one another better” is usually not enough (Bettencourt et al., 1992; Brewer & Miller, 1988; Stephan & Stephan, 1996; Wilder, 1986). The pursuit of bigger, shared, superordinate goals keeps everyone’s eyes on the prize and away from troublesome subgroup distinctions. We’ll return to the subject of how to reduce intergroup hostility later in this chapter when we discuss efforts—derived from more than just the economic perspective—to reduce stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination.

INTEGRATION OF THE MILITARY The integration of different racial and ethnic groups has been remarkably successful in the U.S. military, where soldiers cooperate to accomplish the shared goal of defending the nation.

LOOKING BACK

Consistent with the economic perspective, prejudice can arise from conflict between groups over limited resources. The Robbers Cave experiment serves as an instructive model of this sort of conflict, showing how otherwise friendly boys could turn into enemies when placed in groups competing for a limited resource. The hostility between the groups evaporated when they had to cooperate to achieve superordinate goals of value to both groups.

Glossary

realistic group conflict theory
A theory that group conflict, prejudice, and discrimination are likely to arise over competition between groups for limited resources.

ethnocentrism
Glorifying one’s own group while vilifying other groups.

superordinate goal
A goal that transcends the interests of any one group and that can be achieved more readily by two or more groups working together.

The Motivational Perspective

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- Explain how motivational perspectives account for intergroup hostility and describe some ways they have been tested.

Hostility between groups, it turns out, can develop even in the absence of competition. In the Robbers Cave experiment, there were signs of increased ingroup solidarity when the two groups first learned of each other’s existence—*before* they were engaged in, or even knew about, the organized competition. Midway through the first phase of the experiment, when the two groups were still being kept apart, they were allowed to get within earshot of each other. The mere fact that another group existed made each set of boys take their own group membership more seriously. Both groups quickly became territorial, referring to the baseball field as “*our* diamond” rather than “the diamond” and a favorite swimming spot as “*our* swimming hole.” Soon after learning about each other’s existence, both groups wanted to “run them off” and “challenge them.”

The fact that these developments took place before any competition had been arranged indicates that intergroup hostility can develop merely because another group exists. The existence of group boundaries among any collection of individuals, then, can be sufficient to initiate group discrimination. The motivational processes that lead to this sort of hostility have been explored in a telling research paradigm.

The Minimal Group Paradigm

People’s readiness to adopt an “us versus them” mentality has been extensively documented in experiments using a technique pioneered by Henri Tajfel (Tajfel & Billig, 1974; Tajfel et al., 1971; see also Ashburn-Nardo, Voils, & Monteith, 2001; Yamagishi et al., 2008). Tajfel’s lifelong interest in intergroup dynamics can be traced to his own experiences as a young man. Because of restrictions on Jewish higher education in Poland, Tajfel emigrated to France to study at the Sorbonne. When World War II broke out, he volunteered to serve in the French Army and did so for a year before being taken prisoner. He spent the rest of the war in a German prisoner of war camp, fully aware that if his captors had thought of him as Jewish rather than French, he would have shared the same fate as everyone else in his immediate family, none of whom survived the war.

In his research, Tajfel developed what he called the minimal group paradigm: He created groups based on arbitrary and seemingly meaningless criteria and then examined how the members of these “minimal groups” behaved toward one another.

The participants first performed a rather trivial task and were then divided into two groups, ostensibly on the basis of their responses. In one such task, for example, participants had to estimate the number of dots projected briefly on a screen. Some participants were told that they belonged to a group of “overestimators” and others that they belonged to a group of “underestimators.” In reality, the participants were randomly assigned to the groups, and they learned only that they were assigned to a particular group; they never learned who else was in their group or who was in the other group. Thus, what it meant to be part of a “group” was boiled down to the bare minimum: The category was arbitrary, and members of each group did not know who the other members were.

After learning their group membership, the participants were taken to separate cubicles and asked to assign points, redeemable for money, to pairs of their fellow participants. They were shown multiple pairings of preassigned point values, where one amount would go to a participant who was in the group they were in (the ingroup) and the other amount to a participant in the outgroup. See **Table 10.1** for an example. If the participant were to assign a member of the ingroup 18 points, then the member of the outgroup would get only 3 points, as shown in the first column; if the member of the ingroup received 17 points (the second column), then the member of the outgroup would get 5 points; and so on. Participants assigning points didn’t know the individual identities of the people they were awarding points to; all they knew was the other participants’ group membership. In this way, the investigators could determine whether participants assigned points equally to members of the ingroup and outgroup, whether they instead maximized the total point payout regardless of group membership, or whether they maximized the points given to the ingroup *over the outgroup*, even if the ingroup could have gotten more points through other choices that would have given the outgroup more points as well.

TABLE 10.1 AWARDING POINTS IN THE MINIMAL GROUP PARADIGM

Ingroup	18	17	16	15	14	13	21	11	10	9
Outgroup	3	5	7	9	11	13	15	17	19	21

In Table 10.1, for example, someone who chooses 13 and 13 would appear to be interested in equality. Someone who chooses 14 for the ingroup member and 11 for the outgroup member would appear to be simply interested in favoring the ingroup to a mild extent. Someone who chooses 18 for the ingroup member and 3 for the outgroup member would appear to be interested in maximizing the *relative* advantage of the ingroup over the outgroup, even though the ingroup could have gotten more in the pairing that gives the ingroup 21 points—but also gives the outgroup a more generous number of points at 15.

Numerous experiments have shown that a majority of participants are interested more in maximizing the *relative* gain for members of their ingroup over the outgroup than they are in maximizing the absolute gain for their ingroup. A moment's reflection reveals just how extraordinary this is. The participants don't know who the ingroup and outgroup members are, the points awarded are never for themselves, and, of course, the basis for establishing the two groups is utterly meaningless. Yet participants still tend to favor their minimal ingroup. In fact, they're willing to do so at a cost to the ingroup, which earns fewer points when the focus is on “beating” the other group rather than on maximizing their group's absolute gain. The ingroup favoritism that emerges in this context demonstrates how easily we slip into thinking in terms of “us versus them” (Brewer & Brown, 1998). And if history has taught us anything, it is that the us/them distinction, once formed, can have enormous—and enormously unfortunate—implications.

Social Identity Theory

Studies using the minimal group paradigm have shown the pervasiveness and persistence of ingroup favoritism, but what does it have to do with the motivational perspective on prejudice? Might it not reflect a purely cognitive tendency to divide the world into categories of “us” and “them”? Just as all children quickly learn to distinguish the self from all others, might we not also all learn to distinguish “my side” from “their side”?

Much of the psychology behind ingroup favoritism might very well reflect these kinds of cognitive tendencies. The us/them distinction may be one of the basic cuts people make in organizing the world. Still, the ingroup favoritism observed in the minimal group situation can't be the product of cognition alone. For that we need a motivational theory—a theory to explain why, once the us/them distinction is made, we treat those we consider “us” better than those we consider “them.” Some us/them divisions have the kind of material or economic implications discussed earlier, which often provide motivation enough for people to treat ingroup members better than they treat outgroup members. But not all motivations are economic, and certainly no meaningful economic implications are present in the ingroup/outgroup division in the minimal group paradigm. To explain that sort of ingroup favoritism, a different motivational perspective is needed.

The most widely recognized theory that attempts to explain the ubiquity of ingroup favoritism is social identity theory, which is based on the idea that our self-esteem comes not only from our personal identity and accomplishments but also from the status and accomplishments of the various groups to which we belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; see also Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Spears, 2011; Stroebe, Spears, & Lodewijkx, 2007; Van Bavel & Packer, 2021). Being “an American” is an element of most Americans' self-concept, and with it may come the pride associated with, say, the Bill of Rights, U.S. economic and military clout, and the accomplishments of American scientists, industrialists, athletes, and entertainers. With it, too, may come the shame associated with the country's history of slavery and its treatment of Native Americans. Similarly, being a gang member, a professor, a film buff, or a surfer means that one’s identity and esteem are intimately tied up with the triumphs and shortcomings of one’s fellow gang members, academics, film buffs, or surfers.

STOP FUNDING FOSSILS
I want to #StopFundingFossils because
climate devastation impacts the most vulnerable.
Friends of the Earth
www.foe.org
DIVEST + END SUBSIDIES FROM FOR THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY

(A)

NSP
COSTA RICA

(B)

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY People derive their sense of identity not only from their individual attributes and accomplishments but also from those of the groups to which they belong. (A) For these protesters, being a member of Friends of the Earth and the Sierra Club is likely an important part of their identity. B) These individuals derive part of their identity from belonging to the community of surfers.

In one telling experimental demonstration of people’s social identities, Canadian participants rated the pleasantness of small samples of honey and maple syrup after either having their personal identity or their identity as Canadians made salient (by, among other things, drawing either themselves or the Canadian flag). Those whose individual identities had been made salient rated the honey and maple syrup as equally pleasant. But because maple syrup is so powerfully associated with Canada (the country even maintains a maple syrup reserve in case of an emergency shortage!), those whose Canadian identity was foremost in their minds rated the maple syrup as significantly more pleasant than the honey (Hackel et al., 2018).

BOOSTING THE STATUS OF THE INGROUP Because our self-esteem is based in part on the status of the groups to which we belong, we may be tempted to boost the status and fortunes of these groups and their members. Therein lies a powerful cause of ingroup favoritism: Doing whatever we can to feel better about the ingroup leads us to feel better about ourselves. Evidence supporting this idea comes from studies that have assessed participants’ self-esteem after they had an opportunity to exhibit ingroup favoritism in the minimal group situation, such as the one described earlier in which participants awarded pairs of points to “overestimators” or “underestimators.” As expected, those who had been allowed to display ingroup favoritism showed higher self-esteem than those who hadn’t (Lemyre & Smith, 1985; P. J. Oakes & Turner, 1980). Other research has shown that people who take particularly strong pride in their group affiliations (such as feeling particularly proud to be an American) are more prone to ingroup favoritism when placed in a minimal group situation (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990). And people who are highly identified with a particular group react to criticism of the group as if it were criticism of the self (McCoy & Major, 2003). Also noteworthy in this regard is that people appear to be especially motivated to identify with groups and to derive self-esteem from their group memberships when they feel uncertain about their own attitudes, values, feelings, and place in the world (Hogg, 2007).

REMOVE THE HATE

SOCIAL IDENTITY AND PARTISANSHIP The political divide in America is stark. People’s identities are strongly tied to ideological positions on key social and economic issues, oftentimes resulting in intense partisan behavior.

BASKING IN REFLECTED GLORY Social identity theory also receives support from the everyday observation that people go to great lengths to announce their affiliation with a group when that group is doing well. Sports fans, for example, often chant “We’re number 1!” after a team victory. But what does “*We’re* number 1” mean? It’s a rare fan indeed who does anything other than cheer their team, heckle referees, or taunt opposing players. Yet countless fans want to be connected to the effort when the outcome is a victory. After a loss, not so much.

Robert Cialdini refers to this tendency to identify with a winning team as basking in reflected glory. He investigated the tendency by recording how often students wore their school sweatshirts and T-shirts to class after their football team had just won or lost a game. As expected, students wore the school colors significantly more often following victory than after defeat. Cialdini and his colleagues also tabulated students’ use of first-person versus third-person references. It’s no surprise to learn that, as a general rule, “we” won, whereas “they” lost (Cialdini et al., 1976). As social identity theory predicts, the triumphs and failings of the groups we affiliate with affect our self-esteem—even when the group is simply a favorite sports team (Hirt et al., 1992). We therefore have an incentive to identify with such groups when they do well but to distance ourselves from them when they lose. And to be clear, it’s not just winning sports teams that can provide us with such boosts to our self-esteem: People who back winning political candidates tend to keep their political yard signs up longer than those who back the losing candidates do (P. C. Bernhardt, Calhoun, & Creegan, 2014; C. B. Miller, 2009).

BLOCK
GO BUCKS

BASKING IN REFLECTED GLORY Sports fans, like these Ohio State students, passionately identify with their team and feel joyous when the team wins and dejected when it loses. To connect themselves to the team, fans often wear team jerseys to the game and even to class or work the next day if the team wins.

> “Victory finds a hundred fathers, but defeat is an orphan.”
>
> —COUNT GALEAZZO CIANO, *THE CIANO DIARIES*

DENIGRATING OUTGROUPS TO BOLSTER SELF-ESTEEM To bask in reflected glory is to use ingroup identity to enhance self-esteem. But does denigrating outgroups also boost self-esteem? Does criticizing another group make people feel better about their own group—and hence themselves? Indeed it does.

In one study, researchers threatened the self-esteem of half the participants by telling them they had just performed poorly on an intelligence test; the other half were told they had done well (Fein & Spencer, 1997). The participants then watched a taped interview with a job applicant. Half the participants saw a video that gave no indication of the candidate’ s religion, but the other half (none of whom was Jewish) saw a video that made it clear that the candidate was Jewish. Participants later rated the job candidate (see **Figure 10.3**). Those whose self-esteem had been threatened rated the candidate negatively if they thought she was Jewish; participants whose self-esteem was not threatened did not (Figure 10.3A). In addition, the participants whose self-esteem had been threatened and who had "taken it out" on the Jewish candidate experienced an increase in their self-esteem from the time they received feedback on the IQ test to the end of the experiment (Figure 10.3B).

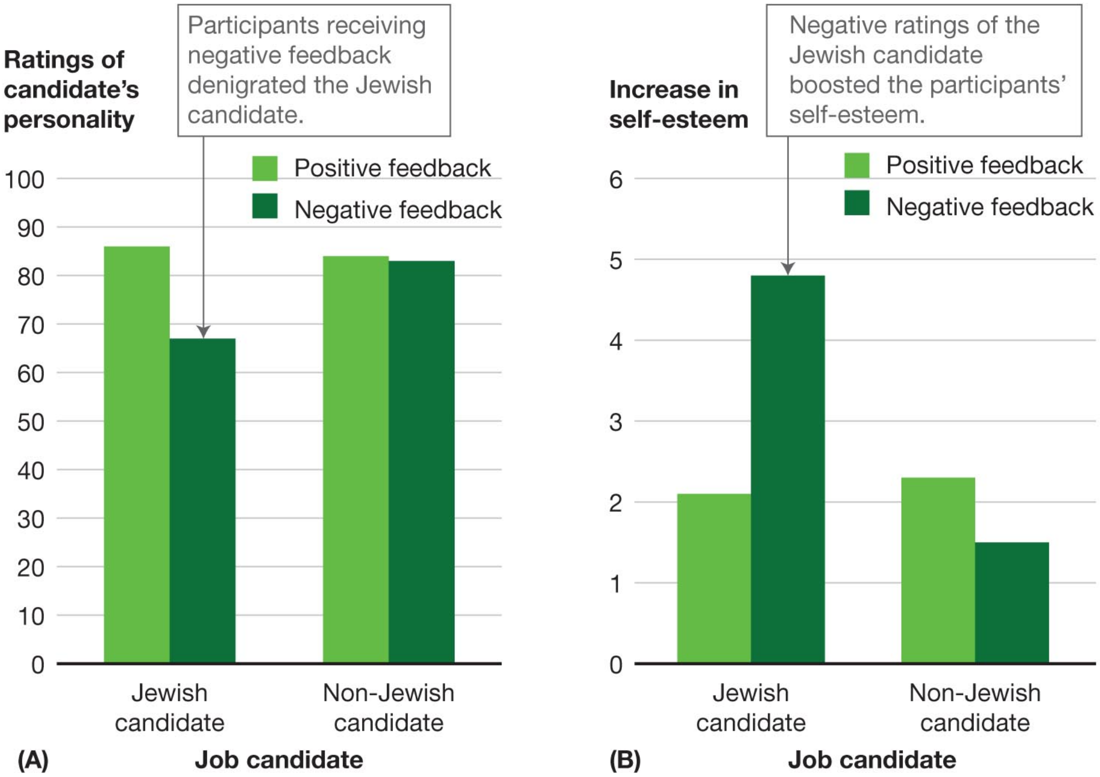
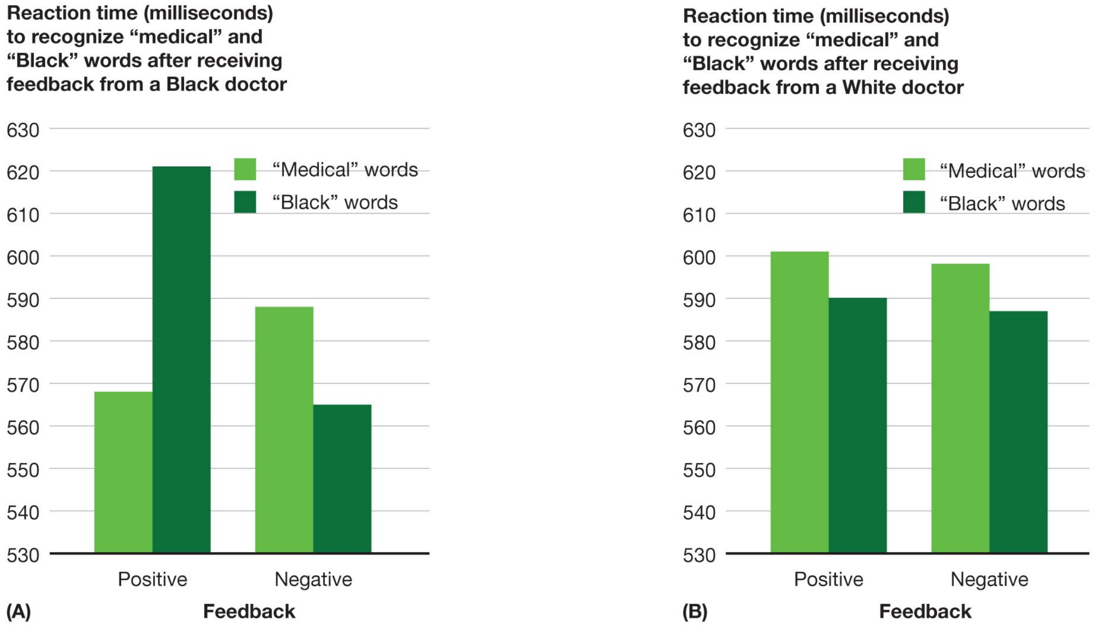


FIGURE 10.3 **BOLSTERING SELF-ESTEEM** (A) The average ratings of a job candidate's personality varied according to whether the candidate was Jewish or non-Jewish and whether the person making the rating had previously received positive or negative feedback. The results demonstrate that feeling down on oneself (a rater who had received negative feedback) can make a person more likely to denigrate the outgroup (rate the Jewish candidates more poorly). (B) Raters who had received negative feedback and subsequently denigrated the outgroup member received a boost in self-esteem from doing so. Source: Adapted from Fein & Spencer, 1997.

Lisa Sinclair and Ziva Kunda explored a related way that outgroups are strategically used to enhance self-esteem. In this study, non-Black participants were either praised or criticized by a White or Black male doctor (Sinclair & Kunda, 1999). The investigators predicted that the participants would be motivated to cling to the praise they received but to challenge the criticism and that they would use the race of the doctor to help them do so. In particular, the investigators predicted that participants who received praise from a Black doctor would tend to think of him more as a doctor (a prestigious occupation) than as a Black man, whereas those who were criticized by a Black doctor would tend to think of him more as a Black man than as a doctor.

The participants performed a lexical decision task right after getting feedback from the doctor (Sinclair & Kunda, 1999). The researchers flashed a series of words and nonwords on a computer screen and had the participants indicate, as fast as they could, whether each string of letters was a word. Some of the words were related to the medical profession (for example, *hospital*, *prescription*) and some were associated with common stereotypes of Black Americans at that time (*rap*, *jazz*). Sinclair and Kunda reasoned that if the participants were thinking of their evaluator primarily as a doctor, they would recognize the medical words faster; if they were thinking of their evaluator primarily as a Black man, they would recognize the words related to the Black stereotypes faster.

As **Figure 10.4** shows, that’s exactly what happened. Participants were particularly fast at recognizing words associated with Black stereotypes when they had been criticized by the Black doctor and slow to recognize those words when they were praised by the Black doctor (Figure 10.4A). The reverse was true for the medical words (Figure 10.4B). Participants were fast at recognizing medical words when they had been praised by the Black doctor and slow to do so when criticized by the Black doctor. When the Black doctor criticized them, in other words, participants saw him as a Black man—and when he praised them, they saw him as a doctor.



Participants who had received positive feedback from the Black doctor were faster to recognize words related to medicine, whereas those who received negative feedback were faster to recognize words stereotypically associated with Black people.

Participants were equally fast at recognizing words related to medicine and to Black stereotypes regardless of whether they received positive or negative feedback from the White doctor.

FIGURE 10.4 **SELF-ESTEEM AND RACIAL PREJUDICE** Participants were either praised or criticized by a White or Black doctor. Reaction times to “Black” words and “medical” words after criticism or praise by White doctors were virtually the same, but participants were quicker to recognize “Black” words when they had received negative feedback from the Black doctor and quicker to recognize “medical” words when they had received positive feedback from the Black doctor. Source: Adapted from Sinclair & Kunda, 1999.

Social identity theory maintains that group memberships are part of every individual’s identity. If so, people will often be motivated to denigrate outgroup members not just when they personally are under threat but also when their *groups* are. Studies confirm this prediction. When White Americans or Canadians are made aware of the changing racial demographics of their country, they express more negative attitudes toward other racial and ethnic groups, exhibit increased implicit pro-White bias, and show less interest in affiliating with members of non-White groups (Craig & Richeson, 2014a; Outten et al., 2012). This, of course, was a much-discussed element of both the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections: The members of the electorate who felt they were being displaced culturally were thought to be most receptive to Donald Trump’s harsh rhetoric about immigration (R. P. Jones, Cox, & Lienesch, 2017).

LOOKING BACK

Consistent with the motivational perspective on stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination, people are inclined to favor ingroups over outgroups, even when the basis of group membership is trivial. Part of the reason is that people identify with their groups and feel good about themselves when they feel good about their groups. Threats to self-esteem also result in the denigration of outgroup members.

Glossary

minimal group paradigm
An experimental paradigm in which researchers create groups based on arbitrary and seemingly meaningless criteria and then examine how the members of these “minimal groups” are inclined to behave toward one another.

social identity theory
The idea that a person’s self-concept and self-esteem derive not only from personal identity and accomplishments but also from the status and accomplishments of the various groups to which the person belongs.

basking in reflected glory
Taking pride in the accomplishments of other people in one’s group, such as when sports fans identify with a winning team.

The Cognitive Perspective

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Explain how basic cognitive processes, including categorization, construal, expectations, and attributions, may account for stereotyping and prejudice.
- Describe how both automatic and controlled processing may underlie stereotyping and prejudice.

From the cognitive perspective, stereotyping is inevitable. It stems from the ubiquity and necessity of categorization. People categorize nearly everything, both natural (bodies of water—creek, stream, river) and artificial (cars—sports car, sedan, SUV). Even color, which arises from continuous variation in electromagnetic wavelength, is perceived as distinct categories.

All of this categorizing has a purpose: It simplifies the task of taking in and processing the incredible volume of stimuli surrounding us. The American journalist Walter Lippmann, who is credited with coining the term *stereotype*, stated:

> The real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting, for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. . . . We have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage it. (Lippmann, 1922, p. 16)

Stereotypes provide us with those simpler models that allow us to deal with the “great blooming, buzzing confusion of reality” (Lippmann, 1922, p. 96).

Stereotypes and the Conservation of Cognitive Resources

If stereotypes are useful schemas that enable us to process information efficiently, then we should be more inclined to use them when we’re overloaded, tired, or mentally taxed in some way—in other words, when we’re in need of a shortcut. Several experiments have demonstrated exactly that (H.-S. Kim & Baron, 1988; Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000; Macrae, Hewstone, & Griffiths, 1993; Pratto & Bargh, 1991; Stangor & Duan, 1991; Wigboldus et al., 2004).

In one intriguing study, participants were more likely to invoke stereotypes when tested at the low point of their circadian rhythm. “Morning people,” when tested at night, tended to invoke a common stereotype and conclude, for example, that an athlete charged with cheating on an exam was guilty. “Night people,” when tested in the morning, were more inclined to conclude that a Black person charged with dealing drugs was guilty (Bodenhausen, 1990). Thus, people are more likely to fall back on stereotypes when they lack mental energy. Not surprisingly, then, people have also been shown to stereotype others more when they’re intoxicated and their mental capacities are low (Bartholow, Dickter, & Sestir, 2006).

If the use of stereotypes conserves intellectual energy, then it should also free up extra cognitive resources that can be applied to other mental tasks. In one test of this idea, participants performed two tasks simultaneously (Macrae, Milne, & Bodenhausen, 1994). On one task, they formed an impression of a (hypothetical) person described by a number of trait terms presented on a computer screen (for example, *rebellious*, *dangerous*, *aggressive*). The other task involved monitoring a tape-recorded lecture about Indonesia and then taking a quiz on the content of the lecture. For half the participants, the trait terms were accompanied by a stereotype associated with those terms (such as *skinhead*); for the other half, the trait terms were presented alone. The key questions were whether presenting participants with the stereotype would help them later recall the trait terms they'd seen and, more important, whether being prompted to stereotype would also release extra cognitive resources that participants could devote to the lecture on Indonesia.

As the experimenters anticipated, the use of stereotypes made the first task easier and thereby freed up cognitive resources that allowed participants to perform better on the second task (**Figure 10.5**). Those given a stereotype not only remembered the relevant trait information better but also performed better on the test on Indonesia (Macrae et al., 1994).

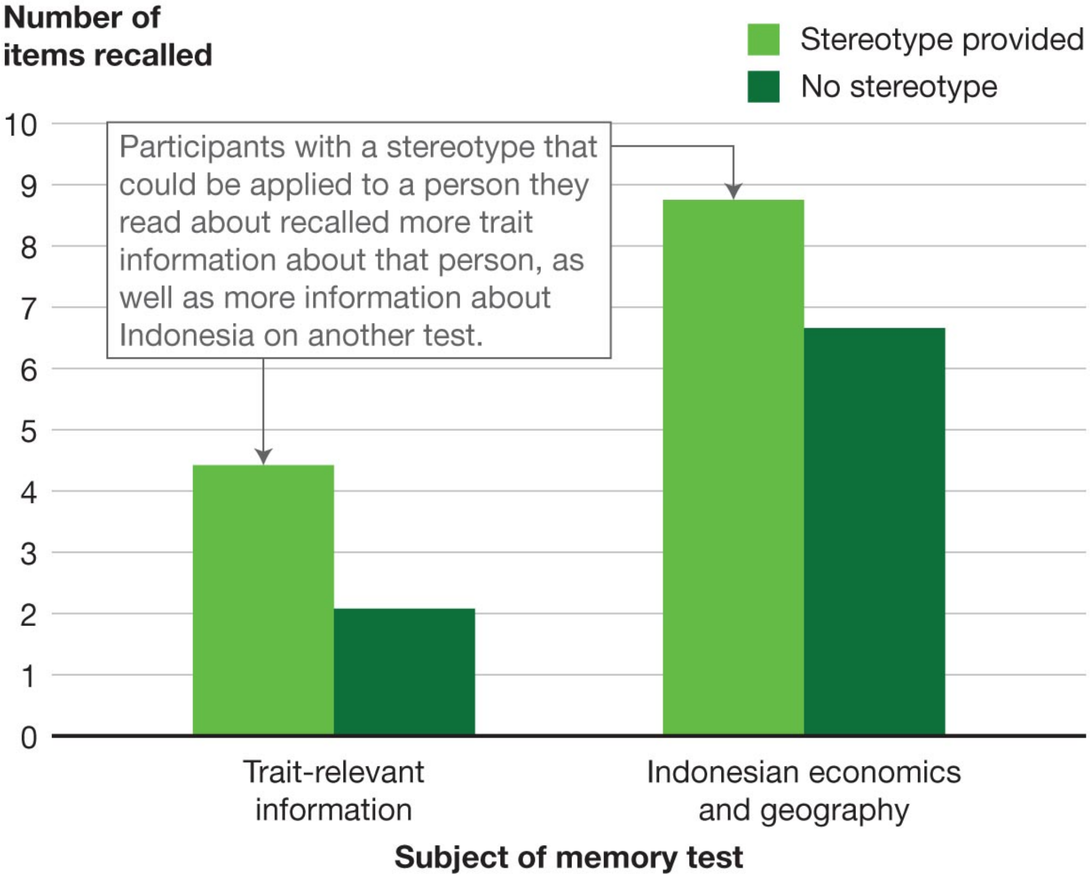


FIGURE 10.5 **CONSERVING COGNITIVE RESOURCES** Providing participants with an applicable stereotype made it easier for them to recall stereotypically consistent information,

thereby allowing them to conserve mental energy for use in other tasks, such as taking the quiz on Indonesia. Source: Adapted from Macrae et al., 1994.

Construal Processes and Biased Assessments

Although relying on stereotypes can save time and effort, it can also lead to mistaken impressions and unfair judgments about individuals. Social psychologists have produced countless demonstrations of this point. A simple and particularly unsettling example comes from an early study in which students watched a video of a fourth-grader named Hannah (Darley & Gross, 1983). One version of the video reported that Hannah’s parents were professionals and showed her playing in an obviously upper-middle-class area. Another version reported that Hannah’s parents were working class and showed her playing in a rundown environment.

The next part of the video showed Hannah answering questions involving math, science, and reading. Her performance was ambiguous: She answered some difficult questions well but also seemed distracted and flubbed easier questions. The researchers asked the students how well they thought Hannah would perform in relation to her classmates. Those who saw upper-middle-class Hannah estimated she would perform better than average, while those who saw working-class Hannah assumed she would perform worse than average.

Sadly, these assumptions, based solely on social class, are grounded in fact (Jussim, 2012). Working-class children are less likely to have access to resources and support, on average, than upper-middle-class children, who tend to perform better in school than working-class children do. Therefore, given an ambiguous performance by a child, participants might reasonably expect better long-term academic success if she’s upper middle class than if she’s working class.

Biased information processing is especially harmful, though, when the stereotypes on which it’s based are completely lacking in validity. If people suspect—because of something they’ve been told, the implications of a joke they heard, or a statistic they misinterpreted—that a particular group of people might differ from other groups in some way, it’s shockingly easy to construe information about an individual in a way that confirms that suspicion. The stereotype is then strengthened due to “confirmation” by the biased observations—a vicious cycle indeed, in which inaccurate, stereotypical expectations lead to construals that confirm these expectations, thereby reinforcing the stereotype.

DISTINCTIVENESS AND ILLUSORY CORRELATIONS As we noted in Chapter 4, people sometimes “see” correlations (relationships) between events, characteristics, or categories that are not actually related—a phenomenon referred to as illusory correlation (Fiedler, 2000; Fiedler & Freytag 2004; Garcia-Marques & Hamilton, 1996; D. L. Hamilton, Stroessner, & Mackie, 1993; Klauer & Meiser, 2000; Shavitt et al., 1999). Illusory correlations can arise for many reasons, some of which are simply the result of how we process unusual or distinctive events.

Distinctive events capture our attention. We would notice if a student came to a lecture wearing a clown outfit—or nothing at all. Because we attend more closely to distinctive events, we’re also likely to remember them better, and as a result they may become overrepresented in our memory. These processes have important implications for the kinds of stereotypes that are commonly associated with minority groups. By definition, minority groups are distinctive to most members of the majority, so minority-group members stand out. In addition, negative behaviors, such as robbing, assaulting, and murdering, are (fortunately) much less common than positive behaviors, such as saying thank you and obeying traffic signs, so negative behaviors are distinctive as well. So, when members of minority groups exhibit negative behavior, it is doubly distinctive and doubly memorable. People in these groups are therefore vulnerable to being stereotyped as more likely to engage in negative behavior than they actually are.

David Hamilton and Robert Gifford (1976) explored the impact of paired distinctiveness—the pairing of two distinctive events that stand out because they occur together—in an experiment that examined the formation of such illusory correlations from scratch. The researchers presented participants with information about the actions of members of “group A” or “group B.” Those were the only group labels they received; these were not existing groups they were familiar with, such as theater arts majors, Indigenous Americans, or straight people. They learned, for example, that “John, a member of group A, visited a sick friend in the hospital” and “Bill, a member of group B, always talks about himself and his problems.” Mimicking real life, most of the actions by members of each group were positive (69 percent, to be exact). Thus, there was no correlation between group membership and the likelihood of positive or negative behavior. But two-thirds of the actions participants read about described the actions of someone in group A, thus making A the majority group and B the minority group.

“Why is it we never focus on the things that unite us, like falafel?”

When later asked to remember who did what, participants overestimated how often members of the minority group performed negative behaviors. They also rated minority-group members less favorably. Even though participants knew nothing about these two arbitrary “groups” beforehand, and even though they were exposed to the same ratio of positive and negative actions on the part of both groups, participants came away thinking that the smaller group did more bad things (**Figure 10.6**). A distinctiveness-based illusory correlation became lodged in participants’ minds; that is, they “detected” false correlations based on the distinctiveness of minority-group members and the distinctiveness of negative behaviors.

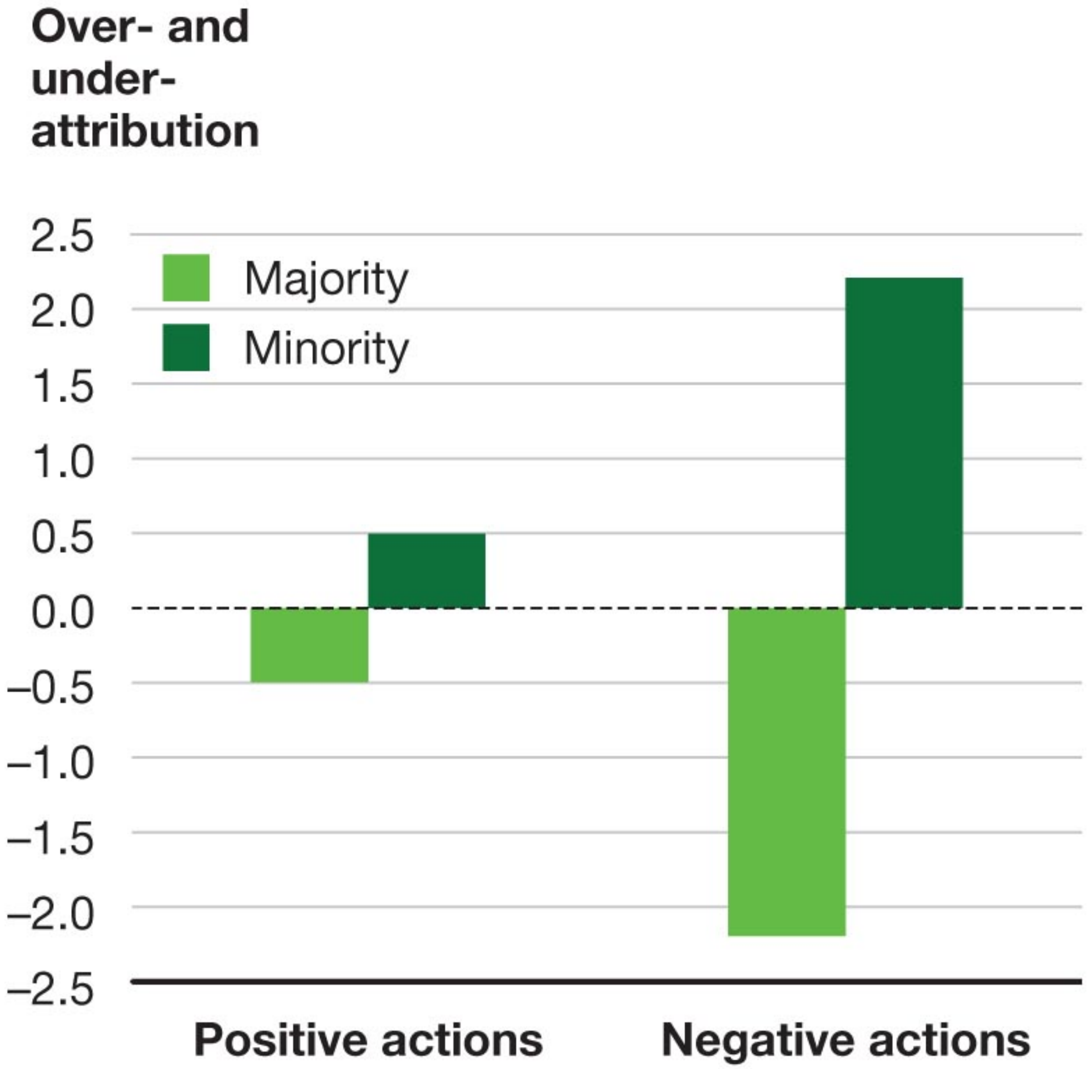


FIGURE 10.6 **DISTINCTIVENESS AND ILLUSORY CORRELATION** Doubly distinctive events, such as negative actions performed by members of minority groups, tend to stand out and exert a disproportionate influence on judgments. In this study, participants attributed more of the negative behaviors to the minority group than the minority group members were actually responsible for. Source: Adapted from D. L. Hamilton & Gifford, 1976.

Subsequent research has shown that beliefs in such illusory correlations can be formed on the basis of a single instance of unusual behavior by someone from a minority group. If you’ve seen few Polynesian people in your life, for instance, but you see a Polynesian person curse at the barista at the local café, you might be tempted to conclude that something about being Polynesian was at least part of the reason ("I guess that's just the way they are"). Of course, if a member of your own ethnic group behaved that way, you probably wouldn't consider ethnicity as a possible explanation ("Every group has its jerks"; Risen, Gilovich, & Dunning, 2007). Members of your group do plenty of obnoxious things as well as wonderful things, so being a member of your own group doesn't normally count as an explanation for any specific behavior.

Hans Alves, Alex Koch, and Christian Unkelbach (2018) further explored why it is so easy for people to associate minority groups with negative traits. They note both that minority-group members tend to be somewhat novel to the majority and that people are wired to associate novel groups with whichever of their attributes are relatively rare among the population at large. If you travel to another country, for example, you're likely to think of the people there more in terms of their unique attributes than in terms of the attributes they share with everyone else. And because negative behavior tends to be less frequent than positive behavior in the natural environment in which we interact with one another (as Hamilton and Gifford noted), some very basic cognitive processes will lead to the unfortunate result of less familiar groups getting tagged with negativity.

> "Stereotypic beliefs about women's roles, for example, may enable one to see correctly that a woman in a dark room is threading a needle rather than tying a fishing lure, but they may also cause one to mistakenly assume that her goal is embroidery rather than cardiac surgery."
>
> —DAN GILBERT

Alves and colleagues tested their analysis by exposing participants to two fictional groups, one after the other, who were described as having a variety of attributes, some of them shared between the two groups and some unique to one group or the other. When the unique attributes of the second group (the “novel” group because participants learned about them after the first) were negative, participants rated that group less positively than they rated the first group—even though the two groups shared the same number of positive and negative attributes. When the researchers flipped things around such that the unique attributes of the second group were positive, participants rated the second (or novel) group more positively. The bottom line is that we associate novel groups with rare attributes. And in a world in which people do more positive, prosocial things than negative, antisocial things, smaller or unfamiliar groups run the risk of unfairly being seen less positively than more common and familiar groups.

EXPECTATIONS AND BIASED INFORMATION PROCESSING To stereotype is to overgeneralize. But of course, people don’t generalize everything they witness to the same degree. Some acts (an epileptic seizure, for example) discourage generalization from the individual to the group no matter who the actor is; other behaviors (such as rudeness) invite it. In general, people are more likely to generalize behaviors and traits that they already suspect may be typical of the group’s members. This is another way in which stereotypes can be self-reinforcing: Actions that are consistent with an existing stereotype are noticed, deemed significant, and remembered, whereas actions that are at variance with the stereotype may be ignored, dismissed, or quickly forgotten (Bodenhausen, 1988; Kunda & Thagard, 1996; von Hippel, Sekaquaptewa, & Vargas, 1995).

(A)

(B)

PAIRED DISTINCTIVENESS (A) When we see unusual actions performed by people we rarely encounter (such as, for Westerners, these Vietnamese children), we tend to wonder whether “those people” are fond of that type of activity, and a link between the two is often formed. (B) When the same actions are performed by types of people we encounter frequently (such as, for Westerners, a child from the United States), we don’t draw any conclusions about “those people.”

Stereotypes also influence how people interpret the details of events. In a striking demonstration of this effect, White participants watched a video of a heated discussion between two men, one Black and one White, and were asked to code the behavior they were watching into one of several categories, such as “Gives information,” “Playing around,” or “Aggressive behavior” (Duncan, 1976; see also Dunning & Sherman, 1997; Kunda & Sherman-Williams, 1993; Plant, Kling, & Smith, 2004; Sagar & Schofield, 1980). At one point in the video, one of the men shoved the other. For half the participants, the Black man shoved the White man; for the other half, the White man did the shoving. The race of the person made a difference in how participants interpreted the action. When perpetrated by a White man, the incident tended to be coded as more benign (as “Playing around,” for example). When perpetrated by a Black man, it was coded as a more serious action (such as “Aggressive behavior”).

These results are remarkable because the participants saw the shove with their own eyes. The influence of stereotypes can be even greater when the episode is presented to people secondhand and is therefore more open to being construed in different ways. In one study, for instance, participants listened to a play-by-play account of a college basketball game and were told to focus on the exploits of a player named Mark Flick (Stone, Perry, & Darley, 1997). Half the participants saw a photo of Mark that made it clear he was

Black, and half saw a photo that made it clear he was White. When participants rated Mark’s performance, their assessments reflected commonly held stereotypes about Black and White basketball players. Those who thought Mark was Black rated him as more athletic and as having played better; those who thought he was White rated him as having hustled more and as having played a savvier game.

Studies like these demonstrate that people don’t evaluate information evenhandedly. Instead, information that’s consistent with a group stereotype typically has more of an impact than information that’s inconsistent with it. This is yet another way that inaccurate stereotypes can stay alive and even grow in strength.

SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECIES Stereotypes can also be reinforced by self-fulfilling prophecies; that is, people act toward members of certain groups in ways that encourage the very behavior they expect to see from those groups. For example, someone who thinks that members of a particular group are hostile might act toward those group members in a guarded manner, thereby eliciting a coldness that’s then taken as proof of their hostility (Shelton & Richeson, 2005). A teacher who believes members of a specific group lack intellectual ability may give them less attention in class, thereby increasing the chances that they’ll fall behind their classmates. As Robert Merton, who coined the term *self-fulfilling prophecy*, once said, “The specious validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates a reign of error. For the prophet will cite the actual course of events as proof that he was right from the very beginning” (Merton, 1957, p. 423).

The damage that self-fulfilling prophecies can cause was powerfully illustrated in an experiment in which White undergraduates interviewed both Black and White men pretending to be job applicants (Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974). Researchers monitored the interviews, and they discovered that the students (the White interviewers) unwittingly treated

Black and White applicants differently. When the applicant was Black, the interviewer tended to sit farther away, to hem and haw throughout the session, and to terminate the proceedings earlier than when the applicant was White. That is not the type of environment that inspires smooth interview performance.

> “Oppression has no logic—just a self-fulfilling prophecy, justified by a self-perpetuating system.”
>
> —GLORIA STEINEM

Sure enough, the second phase of the experiment showed just how difficult it had been for the Black applicants. Interviewers were trained to treat a *new set* of applicants, all of whom were White, the way that either the White or the Black applicants had been treated in the first phase. These interviews were tape-recorded. When the interviews were later rated by independent judges, the new applicants who were treated like the Black applicants were evaluated more negatively than those who were treated like the earlier White applicants. In other words, by treating Black applicants differently and thus placing them at a disadvantage, the White interviewers confirmed their negative stereotypes of them. Similar results have been obtained in interview studies of gay and lesbian job applicants (M. R. Hebl et al., 2002).

EXPLAINING AWAY EXCEPTIONS If every rule has an exception, the same is true for stereotypes. Even if a stereotype is largely accurate, there will almost certainly be examples that contradict it. Of course, if the stereotype is completely invalid, counterexamples will be even more plentiful. What happens when people discover evidence that disagrees with their views? Do they abandon their stereotypes or hold them less confidently?

The way people respond to disconfirmation of their stereotypes depends on a variety of factors, including the person's emotional investment in the stereotype and whether the stereotype is specific to the person who holds it or is widely shared. One thing is clear, however: People don't give up their stereotypes easily. As numerous studies have demonstrated, people evaluate disconfirming evidence in ways that have the effect of reducing its impact. An understanding of these processes provides some insight into one of the most vexing questions about stereotypes—namely, why do they so often persist in the face of evidence that would seem to contradict them?

HOPE
CHANGE WE CAN BELIEVE
Obama '08

EXPLAINING AWAY EXCEPTIONS People who hold stereotypes of ethnic groups sometimes dismiss examples of individuals who

> don’t conform to the stereotypes as exceptions or members of relatively rare subtypes.

When we stereotype members of a group, we don’t normally expect all behavior to be consistent with the stereotype. Groups thought to be dishonest, lazy, or carefree are thought to be dishonest, lazy, or carefree *on average*, or at least more dishonest, lazy, or carefree than other groups; not all members are expected to behave in those ways all the time. This loophole lets people remain unmoved by apparent disconfirmations of their stereotypes because anyone who acts at variance with the stereotype is simply walled off into a category of “exceptions.” Psychologists refer to this tendency as subtyping (Hinzman & Maddox, 2017; Queller & Smith, 2002; Richards & Hewstone, 2001; R. Weber & Crocker, 1983). Sexists who believe that women are passive and dependent and should stay home to raise children are likely to subtype assertive, independent women who choose not to have children as “militant” or “strident” feminists, thereby leaving their stereotype of women largely intact. Similarly, racists who maintain that Black Americans can’t excel outside of sports and entertainment are likely to remain untroubled by the likes of, say, Barack Obama (“He’s half white”) or Vice President Kamala Harris (“Her father was born in Jamaica and her mother in India”). To the racist mind, they’re merely the “exceptions that prove the rule.” (Incidentally, if you’ve ever wondered how an exception can prove a rule—it can’t. The expression uses the word *prove* in its less common meaning: to test, as in, “proving grounds.”)

Subtyping reflects a more general truth: People treat evidence that supports a stereotype differently from evidence that refutes it. People tend to accept supportive evidence at face value, whereas they often critically analyze and discount contradictory evidence. One way they do this is by attributing behavior consistent with a stereotype to the dispositions of the people involved and attributing behavior inconsistent with a stereotype to external causes (Crocker, Hannah, & Weber, 1983; Deaux & Emswiller, 1974; J. A. Kulik, 1983; Swim & Sanna, 1996; D. M. Taylor & Jaggi, 1974). Someone who believes that Jews are “cheap” is likely to dismiss a Jewish person’s acts of philanthropy as reflecting a desire for social acceptance but to interpret any pursuit of self-interest as being a reflection of some “true” Jewish character. Thus, episodes consistent with a stereotype reinforce its perceived validity; episodes that are inconsistent with the stereotype may be deemed insignificant (Pettigrew, 1979).

We also treat supportive and contradictory information differently by varying how concretely or abstractly we evaluate the actions of people from different groups. Almost any action can be construed at different levels of abstraction (Vallacher & Wegner, 1987; see Chapters 3 and 4). For example, if you see a person lifting someone who has fallen, you could describe the action concretely as exactly that—as “lifting.” Alternatively, you could say, more abstractly, that the person was “helping” the fallen individual. More abstractly still, you might say the person was “being helpful” or “being altruistic.” These different levels of abstraction carry different connotations. The more concrete the description (“lifting”), the less it says about the person involved; the more abstract the description (“being altruistic”), the more it says about the person.

CONCRETE AND ABSTRACT CONSTRUALS DURING THE *PALIO* COMPETITION Fans of the *palio* in Ferrara, Italy, tended to see positive actions taken by members of their team in abstract, meaningful terms and negative actions in concrete, less meaningful terms. They did just the opposite for the positive and negative actions of members of the opposing team, making it easier for them to continue to think more positively of their own team than of their opponents.

Researchers examined these differences in concrete versus abstract construal in a study that took place during the annual *palio* competition in Ferrara, Italy (Maass et al., 1989). The *palio* are horse-racing competitions that have taken place in various Italian towns since the thirteenth century (with a brief interruption during the time of the Black Plague). Pitting teams from different districts, or *contrade*, against one another, the races take place in the context of an elaborate festival in which residents of each *contrada* root for their team. In the weeks leading up to the *palio*, feelings of intergroup competition run high.

Before one such *palio* competition, the researchers showed the residents of two *contrade*, San Giorgio and San Giacomo, a number of sketches depicting a member of their own team or of the rival team engaged in an action. The *contrada* membership of the person depicted was established simply by having the color of the protagonist’ s shirt match that of one *contrada* or another. Some of the sketches portrayed desirable actions (such as helping someone), and some portrayed undesirable actions (such as littering). After inspecting each sketch, the participants described what it depicted, and their responses were scored for level of abstraction.

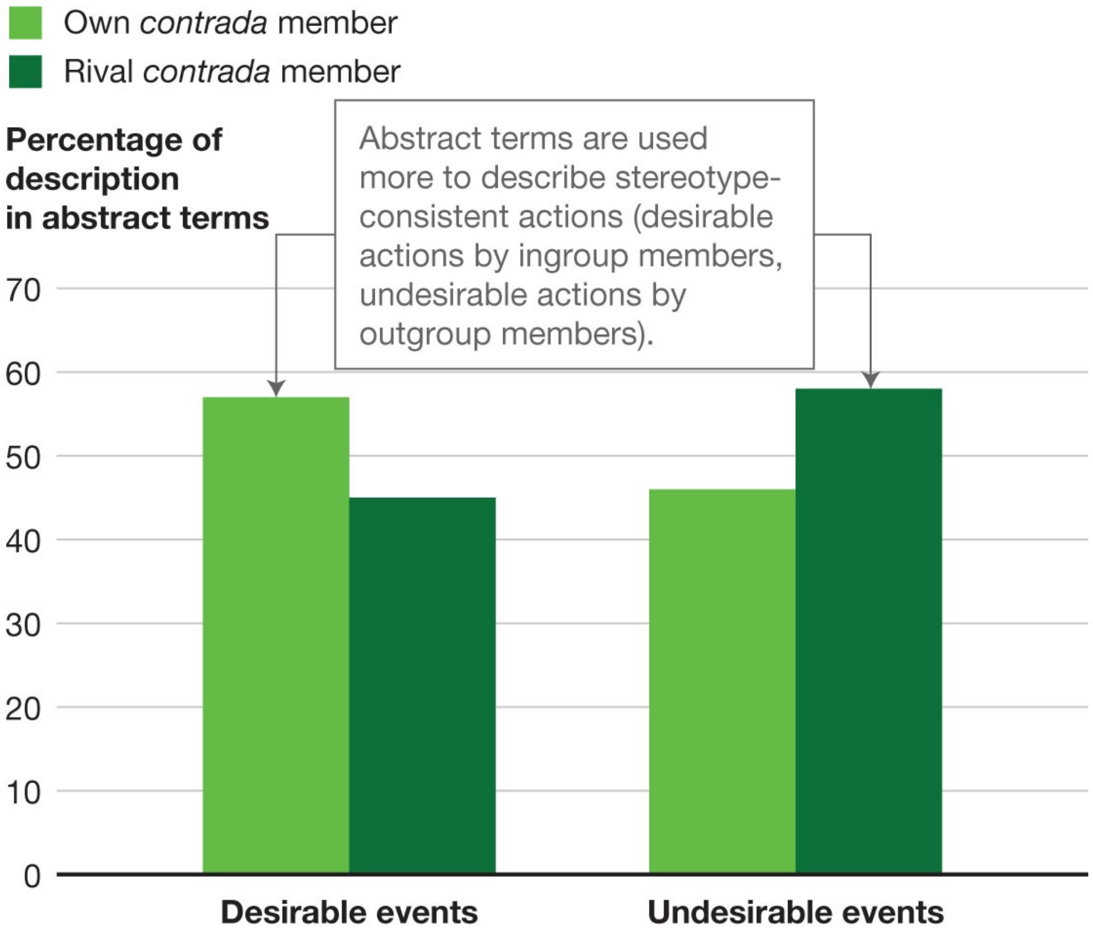


FIGURE 10.7 **STEREOTYPES AND THE ENCODING OF BEHAVIOR**
People encode events consistent with their preexisting

stereotypes (both positive events associated with the ingroup and negative events associated with the outgroup) at a more abstract, and therefore more meaningful, level than events that are inconsistent with preexisting stereotypes. This graph shows the percentage of abstract (versus concrete) terms used to describe desirable and undesirable actions by members of the ingroup and outgroup. Abstract terms consist of state verbs or trait terms (*hates, hateful, loves, loving*), and concrete terms consist of descriptive and interpretive action verbs (*hits, hurts, lifts, aids*). Source: Adapted from Maass et al., 1989.

The results revealed a clear bias (**Figure 10.7**). Participants maintained positive views of their own group by describing their group members' negative actions on a more concrete level—a low level of abstraction—so the individual was less implicated in the action ("The guy from my *contrada* dropped a piece of paper"). But participants maintained their less favorable views of the other group by describing negative actions of the other group's members at a high level of abstraction ("The guy from your *contrada* is a litterer"). They did precisely the opposite for positive actions. ("The guy from my *contrada* is very kind. The guy from your *contrada* lifted the little kid on his shoulders.") This asymmetry feeds the tendency to perceive the ingroup in a favorable light. Analogous findings emerged in a study examining the language used to describe events associated with the candidates in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump (Ruscher & Tipler, 2018). Whereas Clinton supporters tended to use abstract language to characterize positive events linked to their candidate and negative events linked to Trump, Trump supporters did just the opposite. Abstractly evaluating events that fit our stereotypes lends them greater import; concretely evaluating events that violate our stereotypes renders them less consequential.

Accentuation of Ingroup Similarity and Outgroup Difference

There’s an apocryphal story about a man who owned a farm near the Russian–Polish border. Over the course of European history, the farm had gone back and forth under the rule of each country many times. After the most recent boundary was drawn, the farmer was uncertain whether he lived in Poland or Russia. To settle the issue, the farmer saved up to have a proper survey conducted and his national identity established. When the survey was finished, the farmer, scarcely able to contain his anticipation, asked, “Well, do I live in Russia or Poland?” The surveyor replied that although remarkably near the border, the entire farm was located in Poland. “Good,” the farmer stated, “I don’t think I could take those harsh Russian winters.”

The point of the story, of course, is that although an arbitrary national border can’t affect the weather at a fixed location, arbitrary categorical boundaries can significantly affect how we perceive things. Indeed, research has shown that merely dividing a continuous distribution into two groups leads people to see less variability within each group and more variability between the two groups. In one study, researchers divided participants into two arbitrary groups. The participants then filled out an attitude questionnaire twice—once to record their own attitudes and once to record how they thought another ingroup member or outgroup member might respond. Participants consistently assumed that their beliefs were more similar to those of another ingroup member than to those of an outgroup member, even though the basis of group membership was arbitrary (V. L. Allen & Wilder, 1979; B. Simon & Brown, 1987; Wilder, 1984).

The remarkable thing about this result is not that people assume more similarity within a group than across groups. That makes sense. After all, why categorize members into groups in the first place if the members of each group are not, on average, more similar to one another than they are to the members of the other group? What *is* remarkable, and potentially troubling, is that people make such assumptions even when the groups are formed arbitrarily or on the basis of a dimension (such as skin color, age, or body weight) that has no bearing on the attitude or behavior under consideration. In these circumstances, the pure act of categorization distorts judgment. Also, the more people think of outgroup members as homogeneous, the more likely they are to spout prejudices about them and discriminate against them (Brauer & Er-rafiy, 2011).

THE OUTGROUP HOMOGENEITY EFFECT Think of a group that you don't belong to: Islamic fundamentalists, reality TV participants, Tesla owners. It's tempting to think of each such group as a unitary *they*, to imagine that the group members think alike, act alike, even look alike. We also tend to assume that the members of an outgroup are more similar to one another, whereas the members of our ingroup are more individual and diverse. *They* all think, act, and look alike. *We*, on the other hand, are a remarkably varied lot. This tendency is called the outgroup homogeneity effect. The effect can be seen in different perspectives on Latin Americans. European Americans often lump all Latinos together, regardless of whether they're from Mexico, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, or Chile. Meanwhile, Chileans, Puerto Ricans, Nicaraguans, and Mexicans see a great many important differences among the residents of their countries (Huddy & Virtanen, 1995).

One study examined the outgroup homogeneity effect by showing Princeton and Rutgers students a series of videos of other students making decisions, such as whether to listen to rock or classical music or whether to wait alone or with other participants during a break in an experiment (Quattrone & Jones, 1980). Half the participants were told the students on the video were from Princeton; half were told they were from Rutgers. Afterward, the participants estimated the percentage of the filmed students’ fellow Princeton or Rutgers students who would make the same choices as those displayed in the video. The results indicated that the participants assumed more similarity among outgroup members than among ingroup members. Princeton students who thought they had witnessed the behavior of Rutgers students were willing to generalize that behavior to other Rutgers students. In contrast, Princeton students who thought they had witnessed the behavior of Princeton students were less willing to generalize. The opposite was true for Rutgers students. In a different study focused on gender, researchers found that stereotypically gendered attributes are seen as more prevalent among outgroup members, and attributes that run counter to the stereotype are seen as more common among fellow ingroup members (Park & Rothbart, 1982). Thus, for example, men judged stereotypically female traits to be more prevalent among women than women did. In short, people see more variability in the attributes, habits, and opinions of members of their own group than they do among members of outgroups (see also Bartsch et al., 1997; Linville, Fischer, & Salovey, 1989; Ostrom & Sedikides, 1992; B. Park & Judd, 1990; Read & Urada, 2003; B. Simon et al., 1990).

It’s easy to understand why the outgroup homogeneity effect occurs. For one thing, we typically have much more contact with members of our own ingroup than with outgroup members, so we have more opportunities to encounter evidence of divergent opinions and habits among ingroup members. Indeed, sometimes all we know about an outgroup are its reputed stereotypical characteristics. But having more interactions with the ingroup is only half the story. The *nature* of our interactions with ingroup and outgroup members is likely to be different as well. Because we share the same group membership, we don’t treat an ingroup member as a representative of a group. Instead, ingroup members’ individual likes, dislikes, talents, and shortcomings are front and center during our interactions with them. In contrast, we often treat an outgroup member as a representative of a group. If we think members of that group are all alike, we’re more inclined to behave toward all of them in the same way. These interactions may elicit the same kind of behavior from all of them, so each person’s unique characteristics are less likely to be apparent.

The expression “they all look alike” finds support in research that examines people’s ability to distinguish faces of members of their own and other racial and ethnic groups. White people are better at recognizing White faces, Black people are better at recognizing Black faces, and Hispanics are better at recognizing Hispanic faces (Devine & Malpass, 1985; Kawakami et al., 2014; Platz & Hosch, 1988). This own-race identification bias appears to result from the fact that people interact with members of their own race as individuals, without thinking about race, so the individual features of the person in question are processed more deeply. When interacting with someone from another race, part of one’s attention is drawn to the person’s race, taking away from the processing of the person’s individuating characteristics (Hugenberg, Miller, & Claypool, 2007). This phenomenon holds true for other types of groups as well: Both younger and older people are better at recognizing faces from their own age group (D. B. Wright & Stroud, 2002).

Automatic and Controlled Processing

Some of the cognitive processes that give rise to stereotyping and prejudice are deliberate, mindful, and conscious—in other words, controlled. Subtyping (“He’s an exception because…”) is often a conscious process (Devine & Baker, 1991; Kunda & Oleson, 1995; R. Weber & Crocker, 1983). Other cognitive processes, however, give rise to stereotyping and prejudice rapidly and automatically, without much conscious attention or elaboration. This is particularly likely to be the case for distinctiveness-based illusory correlations and the outgroup homogeneity effect.

In recent decades, research using neuroscientific tools has facilitated the study of automatic components of stereotyping and prejudice (Amodio, Bartholomew, & Ito, 2014; Amodio & Cikara, 2021; Cikara & Van Bavel, 2014). One such tool is the electroencephalogram (EEG), which assesses event-related potential (ERP), a measure of the electrical potential that is generated by the firing of cortical neurons in response to a particular event, such as the presentation of a stimulus (e.g., a face of a member of marginalized group). In one set of studies using this tool, researchers recorded participants’ ERPs while they read sentences including noun-pronoun pairings that countered gender stereotypes (e.g., “The firefighter got back in her truck after putting out the fire”) or sentences that did not violate any stereotypes (Osterhout, Bersick, & McLaughlin, 1997). ERP signals are known to be amplified when the brain detects incongruities and thus can serve as an unobtrusive measure of the activation of stereotypes. In this study, participants showed higher-amplitude ERP signals when encountering stereotype-violating stimuli (see also Bartholow et al., 2006).

Researchers have also explored the interplay of automatic and controlled processes (see Chapter 1) and how they collectively influence our reactions to members of different groups (Bodenhausen, Macrae, & Sherman, 1999; Devine & Monteith, 1999; Fazio & Olson, 2003; J. W. Sherman et al., 2008; Sritharan & Gawronski, 2010; Wittenbrink, 2004). This research has shown that our reactions to different groups of people are, to a surprising degree, guided by quick and automatic mental processes that we can override but not eliminate. The findings also highlight the common discrepancy between our immediate, reflexive reactions to outgroup members and our more reflective responses.

Patricia Devine (1989b) examined the joint operation of these automatic and controlled processes by investigating the schism that exists for many people between their knowledge of stereotypes about people of different racial backgrounds and their own beliefs and attitudes toward those same groups. More specifically, Devine sought to demonstrate that what separates prejudiced and unprejudiced people is not whether they are aware of derogatory stereotypes but whether they accept or reject those stereotypes. To carry out her investigation, Devine relied on the distinction between controlled processes, which we direct more consciously, and automatic processes, which we do not consciously control. The activation of stereotypes is typically an automatic process; thus, stereotypes can be triggered even if we don’t want them to be. Even an unprejudiced person will, under certain circumstances, access an association between, say, Muslims and fanaticism, Black people and criminality, or older adults and poor driving skills because those associations are present in our culture. Whereas a bigot will endorse or employ such stereotypes, an unprejudiced person will employ more controlled cognitive processes to discard or suppress them—or at least try to.

Program run, full sequence
SMARTKEY
Operation Mode
Access Level
4
SPINDLE INFO
Overview
PGM
PAL
LBL
CYC
M
POS
TOOL
DIST.
X +4.041
Y -0.001
Z +0.000
T : 2
L +139.2717
DL-TAB
DL-PGM
M126
LBL
PGM CALL
Active PGM: MAN A11047 I95 5 OPD0
X +53.963
Y -2.648
Z +5.953
C +0.000
B +0.000
S1
ACTL.
:MAN(0)
T 2
Z S 5570
F 561
F MAX
AFC SETTINGS
AFC
OFF
ON

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Key Mode 3 - ID: 030053337
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6461 L  X+46.099  Y-1.95
6462 L  X+46.462  Y-1.934
6463 L  X+46.825  Y-1.933
6464 L  X+47.188  Y-1.923
6465 L  X+47.551  Y-1.928
6466 L  X+47.914  Y-1.925
6467 L  X+48.277  Y-1.939
6468 L  X+48.64  Y-1.95
6469 L  X+49.003  Y-1.988
6470 CC  X+48.432  Y-5.461
6471 C  X+49.729  Y-2.189 DR- F836
6472 L  X+50.092  Y-2.356 F557
6473 L  X+50.455  Y-2.507
6474 L  X+50.568  Y-2.541
6475 L  X+50.818  Y-2.598
6476 L  X+51.181  Y-2.638
6477 L  X+51.544  Y-2.649
6478 L  X+58.804

  X    Y    Z    4    5    S    POWER
 13   10   67    4    6    1     [%]
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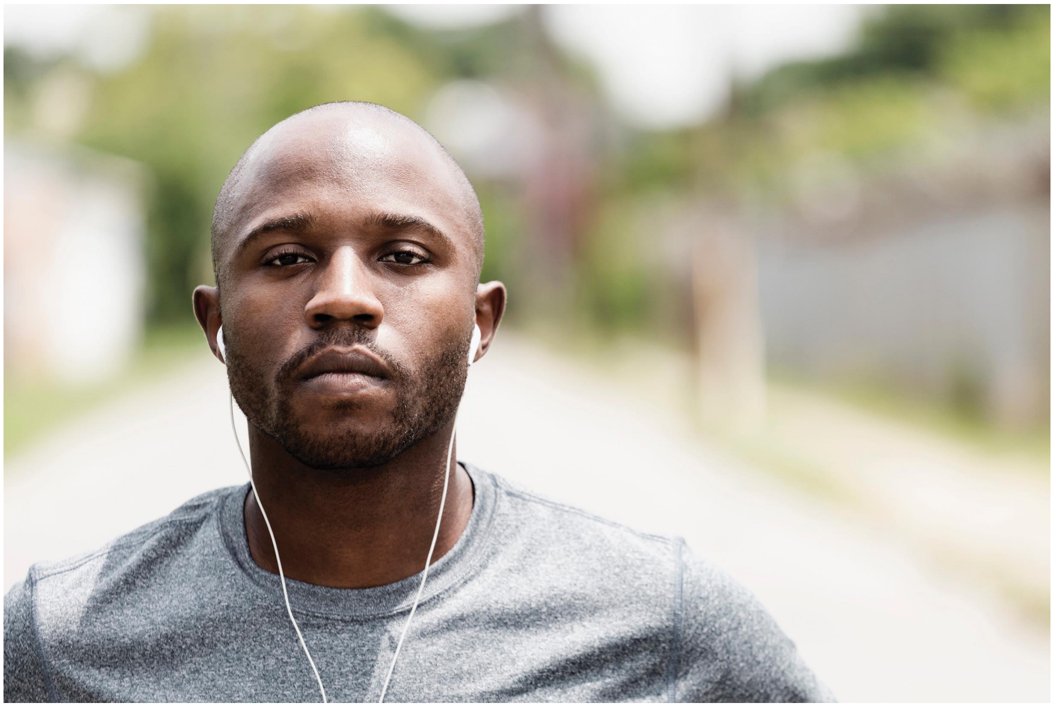


SHARED STEREOTYPES Nearly everyone, prejudiced or not, shares common stereotypes (which they may or may not try to suppress). In these photos, you may have associated the basketball with the Black man, the computer with the Asian student, and the explosion with the Muslim man, even though they weren’t aligned in this presentation.

To test these ideas, Devine selected groups of high- and low-prejudice participants on the basis of their scores on the Modern Racism Scale (Devine, 1989b). To show that these two groups did not differ in their automatic processing of stereotypical information—that is, to show that the same stereotypes would be triggered in both high-prejudice and low-prejudice people—she presented each participant with a set of words, one at a time, so briefly that the words could not be consciously identified. Some of them saw neutral words (*number*, *plant*, *remember*) and others saw words stereotypically associated with Black people (*welfare*, *jazz*, *busing*). Devine hypothesized that although the stereotypical words were presented too briefly to be consciously recognized, they would nonetheless prime the participants’ stereotypes of Black Americans. To test this hypothesis, she presented the participants with a written description of an individual who acted in an ambiguously hostile manner (a stereotype of Black Americans). In one incident, the person refused to pay his rent until his apartment was repaired. Was he being needlessly belligerent or appropriately assertive? The results indicated that he was seen as more hostile—and more negative overall—by participants who had earlier been primed by words designed to activate stereotypes of Black Americans (words such as *jazz*, it’s important to note, that are not otherwise connected to the concept of hostility). Most important, this result was found equally for prejudiced and unprejudiced participants. Because the words activated their stereotypes nonconsciously, the unprejudiced participants were unable to suppress the automatic processing of stereotypical information.

To demonstrate that prejudiced and unprejudiced people differ primarily in their *controlled* cognitive processes, if not in their automatic cognitive processes, Devine next asked her participants to list characteristics of Black Americans (Devine, 1989b). As predicted, the prejudiced participants listed many more negative characteristics stereotypically associated with Black people than did unprejudiced participants. Thus, even though both prejudiced and unprejudiced people may know the same negative stereotypes of Black people (as shown in the first part of Devine’s study), those who are prejudiced believe them and are sometimes willing to voice those beliefs, whereas those who are not prejudiced reject them.

Other studies of people’s automatic reactions to members of stigmatized groups are even more disturbing. In a study by Keith Payne (2001), participants had to decide as quickly as possible whether an object depicted in a photo was a handgun or a hand tool, such as pliers. Each photograph was immediately preceded by a picture of either a Black face or a

White face. The participants (all of whom were White) were faster to identify a weapon as a weapon when it was preceded by a Black face and faster to identify a hand tool as a hand tool when it was preceded by a White face (**Figure 10.8**).

Do these results mean that the White participants exhibited automatic *prejudice* toward Black people? In other words, was the recognition of handguns facilitated by Black faces because the White participants have negative attitudes about both handguns and Black people? Or are these results due to automatic *stereotyping*? In other words, is the facilitation caused by a stereotypical association between handguns and Black people that is activated even in people who don’t actually hold prejudiced attitudes toward Black people?

The good news (limited, perhaps, but good news nonetheless) is that it appears to be the latter. Further research has indicated that Payne’s findings can be attributed to stereotyping. Charles Judd, Irene Blair, and Kristine Chapleau (2004) replicated the experiment with four types of stimuli that varied in whether they were viewed positively or negatively and whether they were stereotypically associated with Black people. Specifically, the stimuli associated with Black people consisted of pictures of handguns (negative) and sports equipment (positive), and the stimuli not associated with them consisted of pictures of insects (negative) and fruit (positive). Judd and his colleagues found that Black faces facilitated the recognition of both negative and positive stereotypical items (handguns and sports equipment) but did not facilitate recognition of the non-stereotypical items (insects and fruits), regardless of whether they were positive or negative.

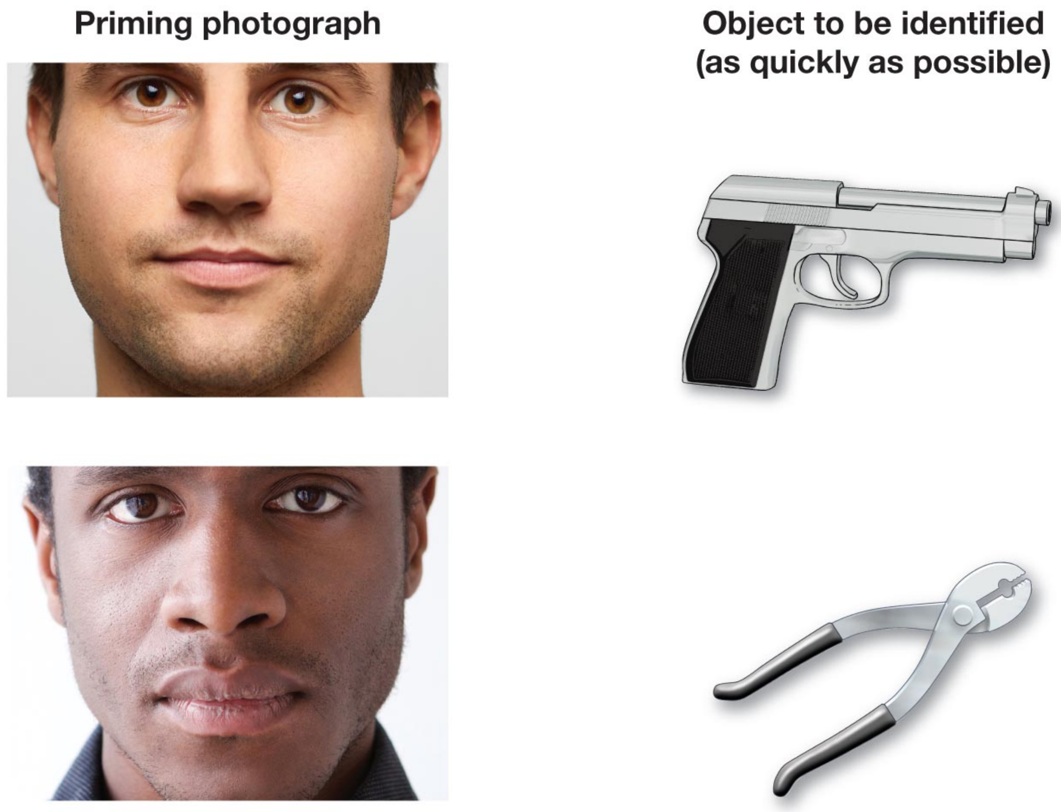


FIGURE 10.8 **STEREOTYPES AND CATEGORIZATION** In this study, culturally shared stereotypes of African Americans led White participants to identify handguns more quickly if they had been primed by an African American face and hand tools more quickly if they had been primed by a White face. Source: Adapted from Payne, 2001.

A similar conclusion has emerged from studies with even more chilling implications for the everyday lives of African Americans. This research was inspired by the tragic death of Amadou Diallo, a Black West African immigrant who in 1999 was shot 19 times by police officers who said they thought, incorrectly, that Diallo was reaching for a gun. This tragedy has since been echoed many times in the shootings of Black Americans that have given birth to the Black Lives Matter movement. In studies inspired by this incident, participants watch a video game in which, at unpredictable moments, a target character—sometimes White, sometimes Black—pops up out of nowhere holding either a gun or some other object (Correll et al., 2002, 2014; Correll, Urland, & Ito, 2006; D. S. Ma & Correll, 2011; Payne, 2006). Participants are instructed to "shoot" by pressing one key if the person is holding a gun or "not shoot" by pressing a different key if he is not.

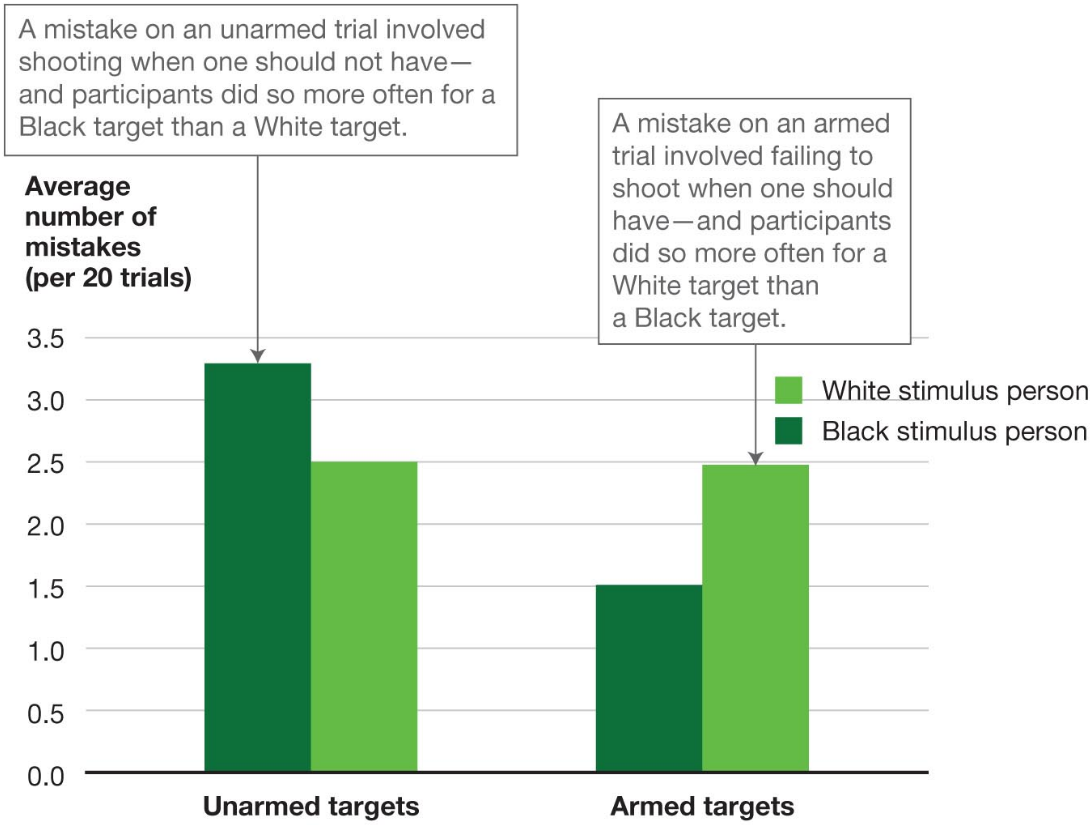


FIGURE 10.9 **AUTOMATIC STEREOTYPING AND PREJUDICE**
Participants were shown images of an armed or unarmed individual who appeared suddenly on a computer screen. They were told to respond as quickly as possible by pressing one button to "shoot" an armed individual and another button if the individual was unarmed. Source: Adapted from Correll et al., 2002.

Because participants are instructed to respond as quickly as possible, they are bound to make occasional mistakes. And, as

Figure 10.9 shows, they tend to treat Black and White characters differently. In this particular study, participants made both types of mistakes—shooting an unarmed target and not shooting an armed target—equally often when the target individual was White. But for Black targets, participants were much more likely to make the mistake of shooting if the target was unarmed than failing to shoot if the target was armed. This effect is especially pronounced when the background (for example, on a darkened street) is itself threatening (Correll et al., 2011; Kahn & Davies, 2017) and when the Black individuals depicted in the video game have more stereotypically African features (D. S. Ma & Correll, 2011). Notably, the same effect was obtained in a follow-up experiment with Black participants. This effect has also been observed in participants' decisions about whether to "shoot" men or women wearing Islamic head coverings (Unkelbach, Forgas, & Denson, 2008).

THE DIRE COST OF STEREOTYPING AND REACTING AUTOMATICALLY
White police officers in New York City attempted to question Amadou Diallo, a Black West African immigrant who had gone outside his apartment building to get some air and

> who seemed to fit the description of the serial rapist they were looking for. Diallo ran up the steps of his building and then reached inside his jacket for what police believed was a gun but was actually his wallet. Reacting out of fear that Diallo was about to start firing a weapon, the four policemen fired 41 shots, striking the innocent Diallo 19 times and killing him.

Prolonged experience with these sorts of shoot/don’t shoot decisions, either through laboratory exposure or real-world police training and experience, seems to diminish the tendency to shoot unarmed Black targets more than unarmed White targets, but the reaction time differences (people are faster to decide to shoot an armed Black person and not to shoot an unarmed White person) generally persist (Correll et al., 2007; Glaser, 2014; Payne, 2006; Plant & Peruche, 2005; Plant, Peruche, & Butz, 2005).

LOOKING BACK

Stereotypes help us make sense of the world and process information efficiently, freeing us to use cognitive resources for other work. But they can also cause us to make errors, such as distinctiveness-based illusory correlations. Stereotypes also influence how we interpret events, and they endure because people act toward members of certain groups in ways that encourage the very behavior they expect (self-fulfilling prophecies). Our expectations can lead us to process information in ways that make stereotypes resistant to disconfirmation, as we explain away information that violates a stereotype and subtype members of a group who don’t fit the stereotype. We also tend to see outgroup members as more homogeneous than they actually are. Stereotypes can result from both automatic and controlled processing. Even people who don’t express prejudicial views may reflexively respond to individuals on the basis of their nonconscious stereotypes and prejudices.

Glossary

paired distinctiveness
: The pairing of two distinctive events that stand out even more because they occur together.

subtyping
: Explaining away exceptions to a given stereotype by creating a subcategory of the stereotyped group that can be expected to differ from the group as a whole.

outgroup homogeneity effect
: The tendency for people to assume that within-group similarity is much stronger for outgroups than for ingroups.

own-race identification bias
: The tendency for people to be better able to recognize and distinguish faces from their own race than from other races.

Reducing Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe several approaches to reducing prejudice.
- Define the contact hypothesis and describe the three conditions under which contact between members of different groups is most likely to reduce prejudice.
- Describe the effectiveness of different diversity ideologies and of diversity training in reducing prejudice.

In this chapter, we have discussed the progress that’s been made in intergroup relations in the United States and across much of the globe, but we have also acknowledged how much farther we must go to achieve true equality of opportunity for everyone. With both of those facts in mind, what has contributed to the improvements we’ve witnessed thus far? What principles can we draw on to advance even more?

Many factors, including specific legal interventions and broad economic developments, have brought about improved relations between LGBTQ and straight people, Black and White Americans, Hispanic and European Americans, and numerous other groups. One factor that is both cause and consequence of these developments is the increased daily interactions among members of different groups. When people interact frequently, it becomes easier to see others as individuals rather than as representatives of particular groups. As Barack Obama said in his 2008 inaugural address, “As the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself.”

Individual Approaches to Prejudice Reduction

What, then, are the most effective ways to make “our common humanity” clear to one and all? Social psychologists have examined many approaches to prejudice reduction. Some of these efforts use the media or school programs to promote acceptance of outgroups or to convince people that their peers frown on the endorsement of unfounded or overly broad stereotypes, the expression of prejudice, and the perpetuation of discrimination. These efforts are often met with resistance because people don’t hold their beliefs and prejudices in isolation; they belong to social groups that guide them back to their old ways of thinking. Nevertheless, some laboratory studies aimed at convincing participants that the prevailing norms favor outgroup tolerance have shown this approach to be effective in reducing stereotypes of stigmatized groups, at least in the short term (Monteith, Deneen, & Tooman, 1996; Stangor, Sechrist, & Jost, 2001).

Outside the laboratory, school reading programs designed to promote greater acceptance of outgroups have also enjoyed some success (Clunies-Ross & O’Meara, 1989; Hughes, Bigler, & Levy, 2007). In one study, British schoolchildren were randomly assigned, over a six-week period, to listen to and discuss either stories about friendships between children with and without disabilities or stories unrelated to people with disabilities. The participants who read about disabled children later expressed more favorable attitudes and a greater willingness to interact with people with disabilities (L. Cameron & Rutland, 2006). Venturing further still from the laboratory, a yearlong field experiment in Rwanda found that a radio soap opera could be used effectively to heal the scars of ethnic conflict (in this case, between the Hutus and Tutsis). Rwandans who listened to the soap opera were more open to intermarriage between Hutus and Tutsis and more in favor of putting the past trauma behind them compared with those exposed to a control soap opera (Paluck, 2009).

Researchers have also studied the efficacy of social media for reducing intergroup tensions. For example, Kevin Munger (2017) examined whether social sanctioning via Twitter could reduce racist online behavior. He first identified a group of White male Twitter users who had publicly used a racial slur to harass other users. He then randomly assigned these users to receive criticism of what they did (i.e., to have a tweet directed at them that communicated disapproval of their use of the racial slur) by a Twitter bot who appeared as either White or Black and who ostensibly had many or few followers (an indicator of high or low status, respectively). Munger then tracked the tweets of these Twitter users over a two-month period to see whether the criticism affected their tendency to express racist beliefs online. The key finding was that the criticism was effective in reducing racist online behavior—but only when it was delivered by a high-status ingroup member (i.e., a fellow Twitter user who was White and had many followers). Also, the reduction in racist behavior held mainly in the short term, gradually fading over the two-month period. This work indicates that social norms communicated via social media can be effective in reducing prejudice, but it also suggests that such effects may hinge on certain conditions being met and may be relatively short-lived.

Cognitive and emotional training interventions may also help people reduce their prejudices through practicing certain ways of thinking and regulating their emotions. One type of cognitive intervention relies on perspective taking, whereby individuals are instructed to envision themselves in the shoes of an outgroup member. The reasoning behind such interventions is that taking the perspective of an outgroup member should increase one’s sense of self/other overlap and, as a result, should lead to more favorable attitudes toward the outgroup member (e.g., Berthold et al. 2013; Devine et al., 2012; Huang, Peng, & Simmons, 2021). An example of a more emotion-based intervention comes from Alexander Stell and Tom Farsides (2016), who examined the impact of loving-kindness meditation—which induces an affective state of unconditional kindness toward the self and others—on reducing implicit prejudice. The researchers found that people who engage in loving-kindness meditation can reduce their prejudices toward outgroups by directing the positive, other-regarding emotions (e.g., love, gratitude) typically elicited by this kind of meditation toward outgroup members. Taken as a whole, these sorts of cognitive and emotional training interventions have met with some success, although a recent meta-analysis of studies examining the value of such interventions suggested that their effects on prejudice reduction tended to be small (Paluck et al., 2021).

Intergroup Approaches to Prejudice Reduction

Until the late stages of World War II, soldiers in the U.S. Army were racially segregated. Black soldiers were relegated primarily to combat support roles, such as cooks, quartermasters, and grave diggers. Segregation remained official army policy until 1948, but in 1944, Black soldiers who volunteered for combat duty were allowed to fight alongside White soldiers in battalions consisting of one all-Black platoon and three all-White platoons. Concerned about the influence of this (modest) integration policy on morale, the army commissioned a survey of White soldiers’ attitudes. The results were striking: Those who served in (semi) integrated units expressed little resistance to the idea of fighting alongside their Black countrymen—a sentiment that was not shared by White soldiers who remained in entirely segregated battalions (Stouffer et al., 1949).

These results led to early optimism about the contact hypothesis, introduced almost 70 years ago by Gordon Allport (1954), which refers to the idea that prejudice can be reduced if members of different groups are in frequent contact with one another. However, it did not take long for research examining the effects of intergroup contact on prejudice, not to mention everyday observations, to reveal that simple contact between different groups is not a magic solution to the problem of intergroup conflict. Numerous studies examined the effect of the U.S. Supreme Court’s desegregation decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) on race relations in American schools, and the results were disappointing. One review of the literature found that a majority of the studies observed an *increase* in prejudice after schools were integrated (Stephan, 1986).

This was not an encouraging finding, to be sure, but given what we learned from the Robbers Cave study, it was not a surprising finding either. After all, simply bringing the Rattlers and Eagles together did not reduce the animosity between the two groups. As that study suggested and subsequent research has confirmed, contact between different groups is likely to be more positive and productive if certain conditions are met.

First, the groups need to have equal status. If one group feels superior and the other is resentful, then harmonious, productive interactions are not likely to be the norm. The second condition, also illustrated in the Robbers Cave study, is that the different groups must have a shared goal that requires cooperation (a superordinate goal), thereby promoting a common ingroup identity (S. L. Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000, 2009; Nier et al., 2001; T. V. West et al., 2009). And as Box 10.2 described, making school assignments more cooperative and interdependent promotes more favorable attitudes between different ethnic and racial groups. Superordinate goals no doubt facilitated the racial integration of the military and later the acceptance of gay and lesbian soldiers, which proceeded relatively smoothly. Soldiers face a common, deadly enemy and must depend on one another for their very survival. Members of a sports team also face a common opponent, and sports have also been effective in tearing down barriers between groups. In one notable study, Kendrick Brown and his colleagues examined the racial attitudes of White athletes at 24 colleges and universities in the United States and found a positive correlation between their attitudes toward Black people and the percentage of Black players they had on their high school teams. But testifying once again to the importance of interdependent action, this was only true for athletes in true team sports like basketball and soccer, not in largely individual sports like swimming and track (K. T. Brown, T. N. Brown, et al., 2003).

A third condition that’s been shown to be important for promoting positive intergroup relations is community support: A community’s broader social norms must support intergroup contact. If children of different races, religions, and ethnicities go to school with one another, but their parents send them begrudgingly and rarely miss an opportunity to speak ill of the “other” children, the students themselves are unlikely to reach out across group boundaries. In contrast, merely knowing that a fellow group member has a friend who is a member of an outgroup strengthens perceived social support for contact with the outgroup, reducing stereotyping and outgroup denigration (S. C. Wright et al., 1997). Finally, intergroup contact should encourage one-on-one interactions between members of the different groups. Doing so puts each person’s identity as an individual in the foreground and downplays a person’s group membership.

An analysis of numerous studies of the effect of desegregation involving tens of thousands of students in more than 25 countries found that when most of these conditions are met, contact between members of different groups does indeed tend to be effective in reducing prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000, 2006, 2008). In a different study, university students who were assigned roommates of a different race reported reduced anxiety about cross-race interactions and registered a significant improvement on implicit measures of attitudes toward the other group (Shook & Fazio, 2008).

When groups with a history of animosity and conflict have one-on-one contact with one another under the three conditions noted above—equal status, interdependence, and supportive social norms—several important changes appear to take place that together help reduce prejudice. First, people begin to see members of the outgroup as individuals rather than as stereotyped, undifferentiated members of a social category, a process psychologists refer to as personalization (Brewer & Miller, 1984). Personalization makes it easier for people to empathize with outgroup members and to think of them as similar to themselves (Ensari et al., 2012). Second, in this kind of one-on-one contact, a person’s positive feelings for particular outgroup members may generalize to the outgroup as a whole. That happens when people see the outgroup members with whom they interact as typical of the group in question (that is, they do not subtype the individual members as exceptions). Finally, positive intergroup sentiments are solidified when members of both groups come to think of themselves as sharing a common identity (S. L. Gaertner et al., 2016; Kunst et al., 2015). Members of sports teams come to think of themselves primarily as teammates, not as White or Black teammates. Members of integrated military units come to think of themselves first and foremost as soldiers, not as Muslim, Christian, or Jewish soldiers. This is the “common humanity” that Barack Obama referred to—something that’s most likely to “reveal itself” when people of different backgrounds come together with equal status to work on shared goals.

Since it was first introduced in 1954, the contact hypothesis has generated an extensive research literature that has continued to grow, particularly in the past 10–15 years (Paolini et al., 2021). The research has inspired the creation of numerous integration, social cohesion, and peacebuilding policies and programs in schools, workplaces, and communities. Comprehensive reviews (R. Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) support the crux of the hypothesis—that contact between members of different groups can, under certain circumstances, reduce prejudice. However, when dealing with a topic as complex as the link between intergroup contact and prejudice, it should come as no surprise that there are many loose ends and many questions that remain unanswered (Paluck et al., 2021; Paolini et al, 2021).

Researchers are currently addressing these questions and filling in gaps in the literature. For example, there is growing recognition that contact between members of different groups can yield either positive or negative experiences, which has motivated investigators to examine the impact of individuals' history of positive and negative intergroup contact on their present-day intergroup expectations and behavior (Schäfer, Kauff, et al., 2021; Schäfer, Simsek, et al., 2021). Researchers are also trying to extend the literature on the contact hypothesis, which has to date largely focused on assessing the impact of contact on the prejudices of majority-group members. More attention is now being paid to the impact of contact on support for social change and collective action among members of both majority and minority groups (Hässler et al., 2020, 2021, 2022).

BOX 10.3

FOCUS ON APPLIED SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

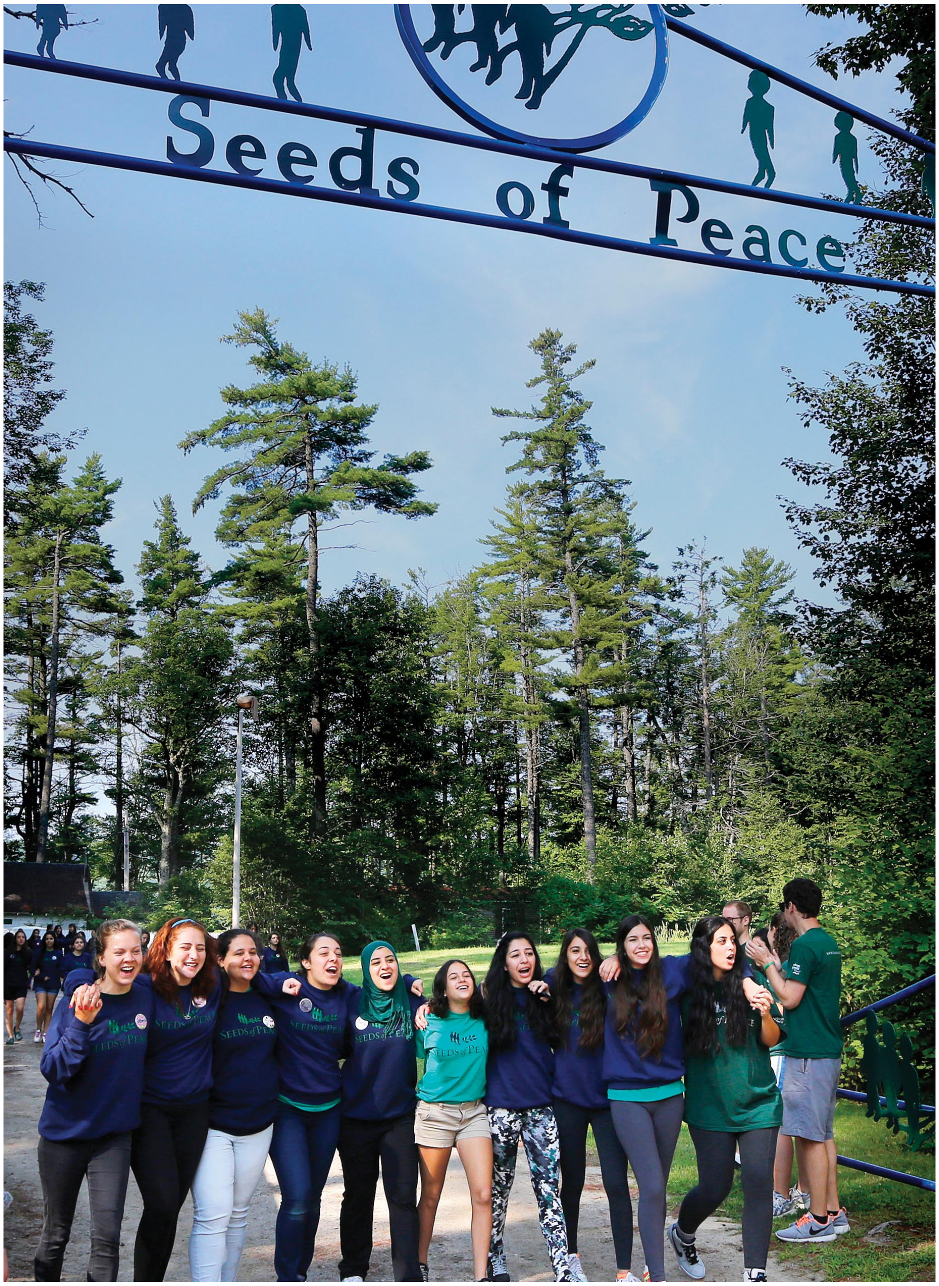
Conflict Remediation

Research by social psychologists on the contact hypothesis has inspired numerous efforts to reduce intergroup hostility by bringing together people from groups with a history of conflict, including Israelis and Palestinians. Seeds of Peace, for example, is a program similar to the Robbers Cave intervention. It brings groups of Israeli and Palestinian teenagers to the United States for a three-week summer camp experience in which they tackle a variety of challenges that can be met only if everyone cooperates. Campers are also encouraged to “make one friend” with someone from the other group of kids.

Do these types of coexistence programs work? To find out, Juliana Schroeder and Jane Risen (2014) surveyed four sets of Seeds of Peace campers, 279 in all, at three points in time: before camp began, as it ended, and more than nine months later (see also S. White, Schroeder, & Risen, 2021). The participants described their attitudes toward the Israelis and Palestinians they met at camp and toward Israelis and Palestinians in general, and they indicated after being at camp whether they had made any friends from the other group. The researchers found that living together for three weeks led to attitudes at the end of camp that were more favorable toward each other’s ethnic group than they were at the beginning.

This positive feeling ebbed somewhat when the teenagers returned to their homes in the Middle East, but not entirely. Attitudes more than nine months later were still more favorable than they had been at the beginning of camp. The investigators also found that forming a friendship with someone from the other group was a significant predictor of favorable attitudes after the teenagers had gone back to their normal lives.

SEEDS of PEACE



SEEDS OF PEACE When Israeli and Palestinian teenagers are brought together for a three-week residential summer camp experience in which they complete a variety of interdependent tasks, their attitudes toward each other, and toward Israelis and Palestinians in general, tend to improve.

The Role of Diversity Ideologies in Prejudice Reduction

Beyond individual and intergroup approaches to reducing prejudice, social psychologists have also studied the role of different ideological approaches in reducing prejudice and in promoting intergroup harmony (Plaut, Cheryan, & Stevens, 2015; Sasaki & Vorauer, 2013). The two most widely examined ideologies are multiculturalism and color-blindness (Rattan & Ambady, 2013). Multiculturalism, on the one hand, views culture and ethnicity as central to people’s identities. It argues that these identities should be acknowledged, appreciated, and maintained and that people should strive to learn about cultural and ethnic differences (Deaux & Verkuyten, 2014; Plaut, 2010). Color-blindness, on the other hand, views culture and ethnicity as skin deep. It thus argues that these identities should be downplayed or ignored and that people should treat others as unique individuals (Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012; L. Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). Which diversity ideology is more effective for reducing prejudice and improving intergroup relations? As the literature now stands, most researchers agree that multiculturalism has an edge over color-blindness (Sasaki & Vorauer, 2013; Wilton et al., 2015; Zou & Cheryan, 2015), but research reveals that each has pros and cons.

In theory, the color-blindness perspective’s emphasis on ignoring group differences and treating others as individuals should foster equality, inclusiveness, and acceptance of everyone. But in practice, a deliberate blindness to cultural differences can lead to more, not less, prejudice and discrimination. Research has shown, for example, that greater support for color-blindness over multiculturalism is associated with stronger ethnocentrism (Ryan et al., 2007) and greater ingroup favoritism (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004). When led to adopt a color-blind perspective, White participants often try to avoid mentioning race in interactions with Black people. These attempts are cognitively taxing, leading the White participants to express more negativity nonverbally and in turn leading their Black interaction partners to judge them as more prejudiced (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008). Research in a university setting has shown that color-blind messages can backfire insofar as they lead all students—men and women from all racial and ethnic groups—to expect more racial and gender bias in their institution and to see less racial and gender diversity, with women of color seeing the least institutional diversity overall (Wilton et al., 2015). Other work suggests that compared with people primed with a multicultural mindset, people primed with a color-blindness mindset are less able to detect instances of racial discrimination and are less likely to describe such events in ways that prompt intervention by authority figures (Apfelbaum et al., 2010). More broadly, adopting a color-blindness perspective may make it easier for White people to see themselves as unprejudiced, which in turn can help legitimize and maintain inequality (Knowles et al., 2009; Yogeeswaran et al., 2018).

In contrast, a considerable amount of research points to the benefits of a multicultural orientation. In addition to being generally preferred by members of marginalized groups over color-blindness (Ryan et al., 2007), multiculturalism has been shown to increase perspective taking (Todd & Galinsky, 2012), to enhance support for pro-diversity policies (Wolsko et al., 2000; Wolsko, Park, & Judd, 2006), to encourage positive evaluations of and behaviors toward outgroup members (Vorauer, Gagnon, & Sasaki, 2009; Wolsko et al., 2000, 2006), and to reduce anxiety about anticipated interracial interactions (Vorauer et al., 2009). Other research has found that White employees' support for multiculturalism in their organization positively predicts psychological engagement on the part of employees of color in the organization (Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009; see also Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). Furthermore, participants from ethnic minority groups have been shown to perform better when working with White participants who have been primed with a multicultural compared with a color-blind perspective (Holoien & Shelton, 2012).

Be a listener
Be nice to everyone!
Never give up!
Do HIGH QUALITY work!
Morning Choices
books
puzzles
journals
Snack
Explore
Ready... Set... Go!
Personal Social:

DIVERSITY IDEOLOGIES Institutions such as schools and workplaces may promote multiculturalism as a means of reducing prejudice and fostering positive relations among members of their communities.

The multicultural orientation is not without its shortcomings, however. First, multicultural messages and initiatives can elicit feelings of exclusion among White people (Plaut et al., 2011) and can be seen by high-status group members as an identity threat—that is, as threatening the value and relevance of their group (Dover, Major, & Kaiser, 2016). Research has also shown that an emphasis on multiculturalism can have the unintended consequence of increasing race essentialism, or the belief that racial-group differences are biologically based and immutable (Wilton, Apfelbaum, & Good, 2019). Linda Zou and Sapna Cheryan (2015) reviewed findings showing that White people’s efforts to take a multicultural approach in their interactions with people from other racial groups can lead to negative interpersonal consequences, such as the “minority spotlight effect” (whereby minority-group identities become uncomfortably salient) and identity denial (whereby people from underrepresented groups feel precluded from embracing other group identities). More broadly, organizational diversity structures that promote multiculturalism can have the counterproductive effects of concealing and delegitimizing claims of racial discrimination (Dover, Kaiser, & Major, 2020; Gündemir & Galinsky, 2018; Kaiser et al., 2013).

These mixed findings about the costs and benefits of the multicultural perspective make it clear that translating multicultural ideology into an effective approach to diversity is not a simple, one-size-fits-all matter (Apfelbaum, Stephens, & Reagans, 2016; Kirby & Kaiser, 2021). More research is needed to delineate the specific factors that increase multiculturalism’s likelihood of success. In this vein, research has suggested that framing multicultural initiatives in an all-inclusive manner—that is, in a manner that includes the cultural majority group (e.g., White people) as part of the approach—is associated with greater receptiveness among majority-group members, who often show resistance to the multicultural ideology (Jansen, Otten, & van der Zee, 2015).

This example points to the importance of alleviating majority-group members’ concerns about being devalued or disadvantaged by multicultural efforts and policies.

Encouragingly, Ballinger and Crocker (2021) reported results based on a nationally representative sample of more than 10,000 respondents from the United States showing that, over the past decade, non-Hispanic White Americans have become increasingly supportive of diversity policies that explicitly value racial and ethnic diversity, such as affirmative action policies. In other words, these findings suggest that White people increasingly view affirmation action policies in non-zero-sum terms. Supporting this finding, these researchers have also shown that non-Hispanic White participants do not report greater feelings of exclusion in response to the diversity efforts of a company described as supporting multicultural versus color-blind policies.

Diversity Training

Fortune 500 companies spend more than $16 billion dollars annually on diversity management, defined as programs intended to foster inclusion in hiring, promotion, and retention of employees from underrepresented groups (Staley, 2017). About half that amount goes toward diversity training meant to reduce stereotyping and prejudice against women and people of color. Unfortunately, not much money is spent on systematic assessments of program effectiveness (Dover et al., 2020). The existing evidence indicates that the positive benefits of these programs may be limited primarily to improved attitudes toward underrepresented groups among women and White people who are low in prejudice to begin with (Chang et al., 2019; Dover et al., 2020; Edelman et al., 2011). Even these effects may decline with time (Bezrukova, Jehn, & Spell, 2012; C. T. Kulik & Roberson, 2008).

DIVERSITY TRAINING Although diversity training has become common in the workplace, more research is needed on how to increase its effectiveness.

There is little evidence that institutions that carry out diversity training actually hire more people from underrepresented groups or are any better at retaining such individuals (Dover et al., 2020). Moreover, majority-group members may become alienated by being required to attend diversity training sessions and may become more inclined to question the competence of members of underrepresented groups (Heilman, Block, & Lucas, 1992; Heilman & Welle, 2006). Indeed, members of underrepresented groups may be prompted to doubt their own competence when corporations emphasize diversity initiatives (Dover et al., 2020). To top it all off, diversity training may make it less likely that discrimination complaints will be effective, since institutions can point to the existence of diversity programs as evidence that they are doing the best they can to reduce prejudice and ill treatment.

What might corporations do differently to achieve better outcomes? The work reviewed in this chapter offers strong suggestions. The key to positive intergroup relations is contact that maintains equal status, interdependence, and cooperation. In other words, hire more members of underrepresented groups and have them work with members of advantaged groups on tasks that require cooperative input from everyone. To obtain these new employees, advertise in outlets that are read by members of their respective groups, and don’t emphasize institutional diversity in the advertisements. Another effective strategy is to hire people recommended by the institutions’ employees who are members of those groups.

LOOKING BACK

Contact between members of different groups can go a long way toward reducing group stereotypes and intergroup hostility. Intergroup contact is especially beneficial when members of different groups interact as equals, work together to accomplish common goals, and interact on a one-on-one basis, as well as when these interactions are supported by broader societal norms. On balance, multiculturalism is more effective than color-blindness in reducing prejudice, but making sure that multicultural messages are nonthreatening to majority-group members may be key to their success. The effects of diversity training appear to be limited, suggesting the need to incorporate elements of other approaches to reducing prejudice—such as fostering cooperation between members of different groups in order to achieve shared, superordinate goals—into workplace environments.

Glossary

contact hypothesis
: The proposition that prejudice can be reduced by putting members of different groups in frequent contact with one another.

multiculturalism
: A diversity ideology that encourages the acknowledgment and appreciation of people's unique cultural and ethnic identities.

color-blindness
: A diversity ideology that encourages treating others as unique individuals and downplaying or ignoring cultural and ethnic group differences.

Chapter Review

SUMMARY

Characterizing Intergroup Bias

- *Stereotypes* are generalizations about groups that are often applied to individual group members. *Prejudice* involves either a positive or a negative attitude and emotional response to members of a group. *Discrimination* is favorable or unfavorable treatment of an individual because of the person’ s membership in a specific group.
- Blatant, explicit racism has declined in much of the world in recent times. But *modern racism* is still prevalent, whereby people simultaneously hold conscious egalitarian attitudes and nonconscious negative attitudes and exhibit behavior indicating prejudice.
- Benevolent racist and sexist attitudes may be perceived as favorable toward a group but have the effect of supporting traditional, subservient roles for members of historically marginalized groups.
- The *implicit association test (IAT)* measures nonconscious attitudes by comparing reaction times when outgroup pictures (or words) and positive items are in the same response category versus when outgroup pictures (or words) and negative items are in the same response category. Other implicit measures involve *priming* a respondent with a picture of a member of some group right before the participant must either identify different words or rate different stimuli. Faster response times to negative words and slower response times to positive words reveal negative prejudice, as do lower ratings of stimuli that follow immediately.

The Economic Perspective

- Three distinct but complementary approaches to studying stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination are the economic perspective, the motivational perspective, and the cognitive perspective.
- One version of the economic perspective is *realistic group conflict theory*, the theory that group conflict, prejudice, and discrimination are likely to arise over competition between groups for limited resources, whether material/economic or cultural/ideological.
- The classic Robbers Cave experiment put two groups of boys in competition at a camp, and soon they were expressing open hostility toward each other. When the groups were brought together in noncompetitive situations in which they had to cooperate to achieve shared *superordinate goals*, the hostility dissipated.

The Motivational Perspective

- According to the motivational perspective, poor intergroup relations can arise simply because there are two groups, and an us/them opposition results. This occurs in the *minimal group paradigm*, in which members of arbitrarily defined groups favor their fellow group members over members of the other group.
- *Social identity theory* attempts to explain ingroup favoritism, maintaining that self-esteem is derived in part from group membership and group success.

The Cognitive Perspective

- The cognitive perspective focuses on stereotypes, which are a form of categorization. Although people engage in stereotyping all the time, they are especially likely to do so when they are tired or overburdened.

- Several construal processes lead to inaccurate stereotypes. People engage in biased information processing, seeing aspects of other groups that confirm common stereotypes and failing to see facts that are inconsistent with them.
- Distinctive groups (because they are in the numerical minority and therefore less familiar to members of the majority) are often associated with distinctive (rare) behaviors. This *paired distinctiveness* results in attributing false characteristics or tendencies to such groups, creating illusory correlations.
- Erroneous stereotypes can also be unknowingly maintained through self-fulfilling prophecies when people act toward members of certain groups in ways that encourage the very behavior they expect.
- Contradictory evidence about group members may not change people’s ideas about a group because people often consider such evidence to be an exception that proves the rule. Behavior consistent with a stereotype tends to be attributed to the dispositions of the group members, whereas behavior that is inconsistent with a stereotype is often attributed to the situation.
- People tend to code favorable evidence about ingroup members more abstractly and the same sort of evidence about outgroup members less abstractly and more concretely. The reverse is true for unfavorable evidence.
- People tend to assume that outgroups are more homogeneous than ingroups, leading to the *outgroup homogeneity effect*.
- People sometimes respond to outgroup members reflexively, relying on automatic processes whereby they reveal their prejudice even without being aware of it. Often these automatic reactions can be corrected by conscious, controlled processes.

Reducing Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination

- Individual approaches to reducing prejudice include directly teaching unprejudiced attitudes, using social media to discourage prejudice, and cognitive and emotional training interventions to encourage people to think and feel in ways that reduce their prejudices.
- According to the *contact hypothesis*, contact between members of different groups can reduce intergroup hostility, especially if the contact involves one-on-one interactions between individuals of equal status, if it encourages the cooperative pursuit of superordinate goals, and if it is supported by the prevailing norms in each group.
- *Multiculturalism* and *color-blindness* are two of the most widely studied diversity ideologies. Although multicultural approaches tend to be more effective in reducing prejudice, they are especially likely to be successful under certain conditions, such as when multiculturalism is framed in ways that include majority-group members.
- Diversity training appears to have limited effectiveness, suggesting the need to incorporate elements of other approaches to reducing prejudice, such as creating interdependence among members of different groups.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Is it possible for people to be prejudiced without being aware of it? How have researchers addressed this question, and what evidence have they found?
2. Suppose that every year the male CEO of a small company asks a female employee to organize the company’s holiday

party. When one female employee asks the CEO why he always gives this task to women, he says that women are better party planners than men. Is this an example of sexism? Why or why not? What adverse effects might the CEO’s positive stereotype regarding women’s party planning ability have on the female employees?

3. Describe the Robbers Cave experiment and outline three important points this study revealed about intergroup relations.
4. Imagine that a conversation about race relations in the United States develops during a family dinner. One of your relatives argues that given how ubiquitous stereotypes are, prejudice and discrimination are inevitable. Using research from the cognitive perspective, and controlled and automatic processing in particular, how would you respond to this assertion? Are prejudice and discrimination inevitable? Under which conditions are they most likely to emerge?
5. Suppose you are a social psychologist and have been hired to help reduce prejudice and discrimination among students of different races, classes, cultures, and sexual orientations in a school system. What might you suggest in addressing this concern?

The answer guidelines for the Think About It questions can be found at the back of the book . . .

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CHAPTER
11

Living in a Prejudiced World

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What do people’s thoughts and feelings about people experiencing homelessness tell us about the structure of the most common stereotypes?

Does knowing that society holds certain stereotypes about a group that you belong to influence how you perform—for example, on a standardized aptitude test?

What are some of the challenges that can arise when people from different ethnic, racial, religious, and socioeconomic groups interact with one another?

OUTLINE

- Social Dominance Theory
- The Stereotype Content Model
- The Effects of Stereotypes and Prejudice on the Individual
- The Effects of Stereotypes and Prejudice on Social Interaction
- The Effects of Stereotypes and Prejudice on Society

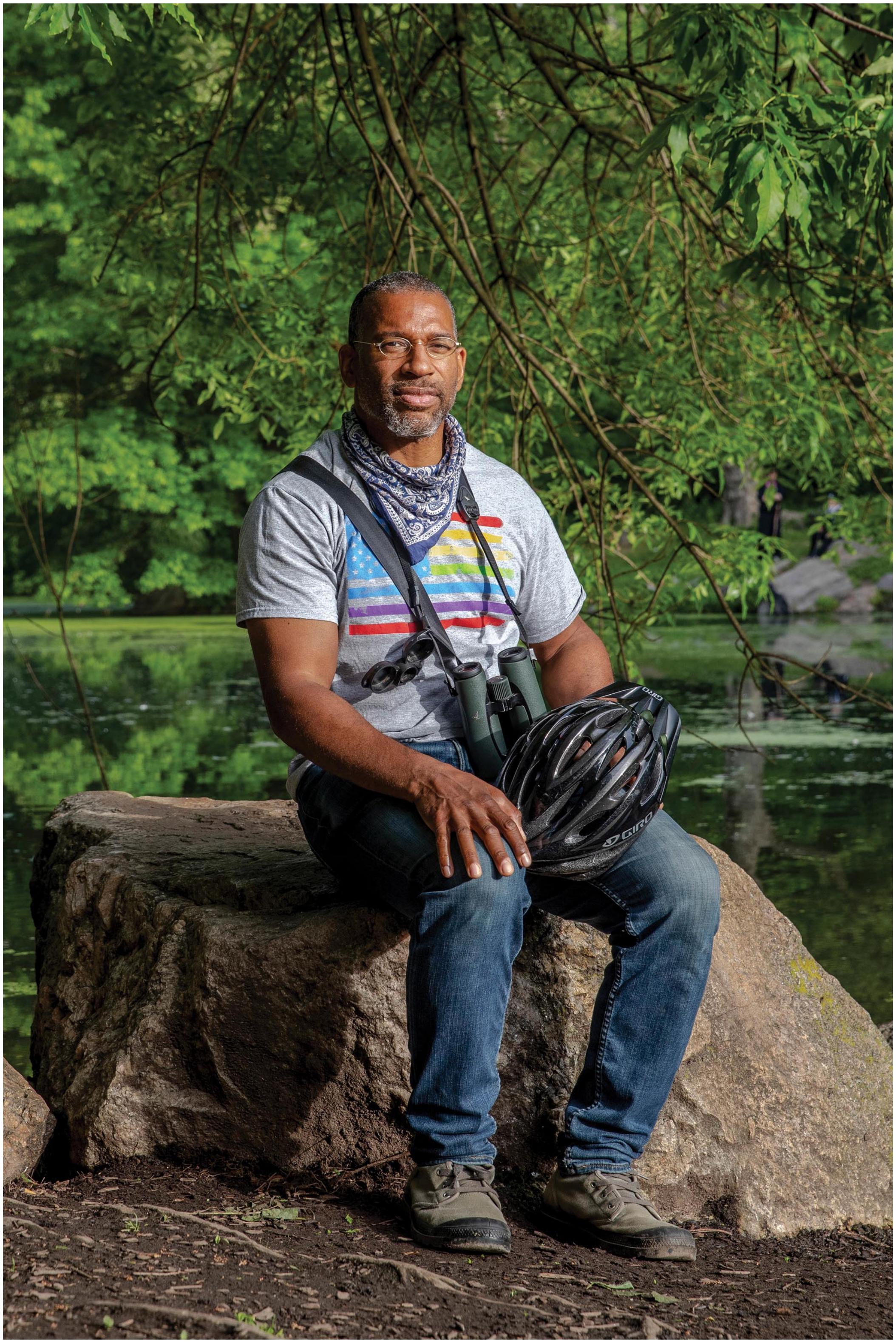
ON MAY 25, 2020—THE SAME DAY that George Floyd was murdered by a member of the Minneapolis police department, sparking demonstrations across the United States against racism and police brutality—Christian Cooper was bird-watching in

Manhattan’s Central Park. Cooper, who is Black and a member of the New York City Audubon Society, encountered a White woman walking her dog without a leash in violation of park regulations. When Cooper asked her to leash her dog, the woman, Amy Cooper (the shared last name another coincidence), refused. Christian replied, “Look, if you’re going to do what you want, I’m going to do what I want, but you’re not going to like it.” He then enticed the dog over to him with a dog treat. After Amy yelled, “Don’t touch my dog,” Christian began recording the interaction on his smartphone, an interaction that has since been viewed tens of millions of times.

In the video, Amy can be seen rapidly approaching Christian, and their interaction unfolds as follows:

> Amy: “Sir, I’m asking you to stop recording me.”
>
> Christian: “Please don’t come close to me.”
>
> Amy: “ . . . I’m calling the cops.”
>
> Christian: “Please call the cops. Please call the cops.”
>
> Amy: “I’m going to tell them there’s an African American man threatening my life.”
>
> Christian: “Please tell them whatever you like.”

Amy then tells the 911 dispatcher where she is in the park and that “there is a man, African American, who has a bicycle helmet. He is recording me and threatening me and my dog.”



(A)

(B)

(C)

LIVING IN A PREJUDICED WORLD (A) Christian Cooper and (B) Amy Cooper. Their now-infamous incident in Manhattan’s Central Park inspired Chris Cooper to create Black Birders Week, an online series of events aimed at highlighting the challenges that Black birdwatchers face (C).

It’s impossible to know whether or how much Amy Cooper felt threatened that day, but whatever her mental state, her actions highlight the topic of this chapter: what it is like to live in a prejudiced world. Amy did not say she was threatened by a bird-watcher, or by a man, but by an African American man, revealing one of her prejudices. Just as critically, she was counting on the dispatcher sharing her prejudice so that her call for assistance would be received with greater urgency. “I’m being threatened by a bird-watcher,” she assumed, would be unlikely to spark much alarm.

Christian was certainly aware of those prejudices as well. He was eager to record the interaction so that those prejudices wouldn’t lend Amy’s side of the story greater credence in any “he said, she said” exchange to follow. He was wise to do so—not only because countless Black men have been convicted of crimes they did not commit solely on the basis of their White accusers’ testimony but also because he ended up coming across rather well to most viewers of the exchange. Indeed, the incident led to the creation of Black Birders Week, a weeklong series of online events designed to highlight the challenges Black birders can face alone or in small groups in the outdoors.

Amy Cooper did not fare as well. She has been mocked and vilified both online and in traditional media, and she lost her job at the asset management company Franklin Templeton.

In yet another illustration of what it’s like to live in a prejudiced world (and in yet another irony), Amy Cooper has come to be known as the “Central Park Karen” even though her given name is Amy, not Karen. This strange twist to the story stems from another stereotype: The name Karen has become associated with entitled, pushy White women who are inclined toward racist attitudes. What is it like to be named Karen in today’s world—especially a Karen who, like most of us, was previously happy with her name—and to have to live now with the knowledge of what that name means to others? (Full disclosure: One of the authors is married to a Karen, who is as different from the stereotype as it is possible for a person to be.)

The previous chapter dealt with the causes of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, which necessitated a focus on the perpetrators of prejudice (a group, it should be clear by now, that can be presumed to include all of us). But this chapter focuses more on the victims of prejudice: members of stigmatized groups. What is life like for them? How are they personally affected, how are their interactions with others influenced, and how is society as a whole affected as a result? These are the questions we address in this chapter. We do so by first considering two broad theoretical perspectives that provide a foundation for considering these issues. One deals with how people respond to entrenched differences in power, wealth, and status, and the other deals with the dimensions underlying the many stereotypes that people the world over hold about different groups. ■

Social Dominance Theory

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify the different ways that, according to social dominance theory, hierarchies are maintained.
- Explain how beliefs in meritocracy, a just world, and economic and social mobility are intertwined and help preserve hierarchies.

Although countless artists, philosophers, and political theorists have romanticized the idea of the egalitarian society, this idea has remained exactly that—a romanticization. All human societies are hierarchical, although some are more so (the ancient Egyptians or Indonesians today) than others (many Native American tribes or the Rojava in the Kurdish enclaves of Syria today). Social dominance theory takes the hierarchical structure of all societies as a given. It both articulates the most common dimensions of inequality and tries to account for how hierarchical societies, which by their very nature are unequal, nevertheless remain stable and endure over very long periods of time (Sidanius, Devereux, & Pratto, 1992; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Social dominance theorists note that societies' hierarchies tend to be based on age (with adults having more power than children), on gender (with men having more power than women), and on what they call an "arbitrary set." The latter, as the name implies, takes different forms in different societies. For instance, it may be based on ethnicity (e.g., in Rwanda, the United States, and many South American countries), on religion (e.g., Sunni versus Shia, Catholic versus Protestant, or Sikh versus Hindu), or on race (e.g., in all countries with a history of slavery).

Because tensions can arise whenever there is inequality, a main focus of social dominance theory is specifying the social and psychological structures that evolve to prevent those tensions from erupting into destabilizing conflict. Hierarchies are said to be kept in place through:

- *individual discrimination*, in which individuals in the dominant groups act to preserve their advantage and to keep those in subordinate groups “in their place”;
- *institutional discrimination*, in which laws and norms preserve the hierarchy; and
- *behavioral asymmetries*, in which deference is shown to members of dominant but not subordinate groups and self-fulfilling prophecies undermine the achievements of members of subordinate groups.

Individual discrimination can be found every day in news accounts of the mistreatment of racial, ethnic, sexual, and religious minority groups in every corner of the globe. It is experienced when parents announce the birth of their boys with more evident pride than the birth of their girls (Gonzalez & Koestner, 2005), when people lock their car doors or cross the street to avoid members of stigmatized groups, and when individual law enforcement officers run afoul of their training and treat members of stigmatized groups with an iron fist (more on all of this below). The connection between such events and the concern with hierarchy—particularly with the prospect of losing a privileged status—is reflected in the fact that when White Americans learn that the United States will become a “majority-minority” country (in which Whites will be the largest racial group but not the majority, as they are now), they tend to express more negative attitudes toward Asian, Black, and Hispanic people (Craig & Richeson, 2014a) and come to believe that discrimination against Whites will increase (Craig & Richeson, 2017).

Concerns about the dissolution of existing hierarchy and the prospect of losing a dominant position in it are also reflected in the actions of individuals who subscribe to the “great replacement theory,” which takes its name from a book, *Le Grand Remplacement*, by the French author Renaud Camus (not to be confused with Albert Camus, the Nobel Prize–winning author of such works as *The Stranger* and *The Plague*). Great replacement theory posits that White people throughout Europe and in the United States are being “replaced” by non-White people from around the globe. The idea has received considerable traction among various White supremacy groups in Europe and the United States, including those who marched across the University of Virginia campus in 2017 chanting, “You will not replace us!” and “Jews will not replace us!” Concerns with replacement appear to have inspired the assailant in the 2019 attacks on two mosques that killed 51 people in Christchurch, New Zealand; the individual who killed 23 people in a rampage at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, the same year; and the gunman who targeted Black people in a Buffalo, New York, supermarket in 2022, killing 10.

(A)

(B)

SOCIAL DOMINANCE THEORY According to social dominance theory, dominant groups are reluctant to give up their privileged status in society. Here (A) White nationalists concerned about “replacement” by other races protesting on the University of Virginia campus. (B) Members of a right-wing nationalist group demonstrating on the Rue de Rivoli in Paris, France.

Mass murderers like those three are extremists whose vile actions are denounced by nearly everyone. And White supremacists are but a small—though growing—minority in the United States (Gunter & Southern Poverty Law Center’s Intelligence Project, 2020). The fact that they remain a minority shows that individuals in the dominant groups of society differ in the degree to which they’re concerned about losing their status and privilege. This has led to the development of scales designed to assess the extent to which a person is oriented toward the preservation of hierarchy and the status quo (Pratto et al., 1994). Research has shown that people who score higher on this scale of social dominance orientation are more willing to express prejudiced attitudes toward different groups and are more inclined to endorse policies that preserve existing hierarchies (Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006).

What about all those people (that is, most people in most societies today) who don’t score very high on the scale of social dominance orientation and aren’t especially comfortable with the idea that some people, by dint of luck or birth alone, are granted more status and more material resources than others? According to social dominance theory, even they can remain untroubled by evidence of institutional discrimination if they buy into ideological tenets, or *legitimizing myths*, that make unequal treatment seem not only perfectly reasonable but highly desirable. That is, some people don’t see observed discrepancies in status and wealth as troubling because they don’t see them as the products of good luck or accidents of birth. The divine right of kings was one such belief that served to preserve the social order for centuries. The authority of the king came from God and therefore could not be questioned. Similarly, many of the assumptions baked into sexism, racism, and ethnocentrism make it easier to accept stark inequalities because they justify why those in the dominant group have so much more than those in subordinate groups do. No less an authority than Walter Lippmann (1922), who coined the term *stereotype*, noted that people’s stereotypes constitute “the defenses of our position in society.”

Stereotypes about who is and isn’t productive or virtuous govern who is and isn’t thought to be deserving. In the United States, for example, such stereotypes legitimized longer prison sentences for possession of crack cocaine (used more often in Black neighborhoods) than powder cocaine (used more often in White neighborhoods), the federal government’s refusal to issue mortgages in African American neighborhoods while subsidizing the development of all-White suburbs (a practice that led to the development of the Fair Housing Act in 1968 and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974 to combat this bias), and the confiscation of Indigenous Americans’ lands as part of the “manifest destiny” of U.S. expansion (Eberhardt, 2019; Rothstein, 2017).

Believing In Strict Meritocracy, a Just World, and Economic Mobility

The very word *meritocracy* connotes that some people merit more than others do. Most of us are okay with that because some people do indeed work harder and are more talented than others. Is anyone upset that Tom Hanks makes more money than they do or that Serena Williams can take more lavish vacations? Of course not. But many have argued that strict meritocracy is something of a myth that fails to acknowledge either the role of luck in everyone’s life or the vast differences in opportunity and privilege that create unequal outcomes (R. H. Frank, 2016; Sandel, 2020).

The belief in strict meritocracy runs into further difficulties when erroneous stereotypes distort assessments of merit. Social dominance theorists note that dominant groups use their position to make it easier for members of their own groups to succeed—and then turn around and cite the failure of subordinate groups to achieve similar levels of success as evidence that members of those groups don’t have what it takes to get ahead.

A related, broader legitimizing myth that social psychologists have studied extensively is the just world hypothesis—the belief that people get what they deserve in life and deserve what they get (Lambert, Burroughs, & Nguyen, 1999; M. J. Lerner, 1980; Lipkusa, Dalbert, & Siegler, 1996; Nudelman & Shiloh, 2011). Victims of rape, for example, are often viewed as responsible for their fate (Abrams et al., 2003; S. T. Bell, Kuriloff, & Lottes, 1994), as are victims of domestic abuse (Summers & Feldman, 1984). The just world hypothesis reaches its zenith in the claim that if no defect in a victim’s character or past actions can be found, the tragic affliction must be due to some flaw or transgression in a “past life” (Woolger, 1988). Studies have shown that people are broadly inclined to “derogate the victim”—to disparage the character of those who suffer unfortunate experiences that are completely beyond their personal control (C. Jones & Aronson, 1973; M. J. Lerner & Miller, 1978; M. J. Lerner & Simmons, 1966).

JUST WORLD HYPOTHESIS In part because there are so many well-known “rags to riches” success stories in the United States, such as Apple Computer Company getting its start in the garage of Steve Jobs’s childhood home, people tend to overestimate the amount of economic mobility there is in the country.

The belief in a just world stems in part from the desire to be reassured that bad things won’t happen to us. The twists and turns of life can be unsettling: A superbly qualified job candidate may be passed over in favor of a mediocre applicant with the right connections; a selfless Good Samaritan may be stricken with cancer and experience an agonizing death. Such events cause anxiety, so we’re motivated to think they can’t happen to us. We do so by attributing terrible outcomes to something about the people who suffer them rather than to fate or chance (Burger, 1981; Walster, 1966). By thinking that people “get what they deserve” or that “what goes around comes around,” we reassure ourselves that nothing bad will happen to us if we are the right kind of person living the right kind of life.

A corollary of the belief in meritocracy is the idea that “the cream always rises to the top” or that those with sufficient talent and drive will succeed regardless of where they started in life. It’s easy to see why people would have such a conviction because notable examples are all around us—Abraham Lincoln being born in a log cabin and becoming president of the United States; Barack Obama’s equally spectacular rise to the most powerful office in the world; the world’s most valuable publicly traded company, Apple Inc., getting its start in Steve Jobs’s parents’ garage. The problem is that spectacular examples like these can lead us to believe that there is more mobility than there actually is (and thus that society is more meritocratic than it actually is).

Because a belief in mobility plays such an important role in the idea of the United States as a “land of opportunity,” one study asked a sample of American respondents to rank 15 countries in terms of economic mobility—Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, France, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, Pakistan, Peru, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The United States ranks eighth among these countries in actual economic mobility, so respondents had an equal chance of overestimating or underestimating the countries’ levels of mobility. That equal chance notwithstanding, the “land of opportunity” ideal had a noticeable impact on respondents’ assessments: They ranked the United States third among these countries, significantly higher than its actual ranking. Interestingly, conservatives ranked it highest among all 15 countries on average, whereas liberals ranked it fourth (Davidai & Gilovich, 2018). Other studies have shown that people overestimate economic mobility in the United States not just relative to other countries but also relative to the actual likelihood of someone born on the lower rungs of the economic ladder rising to the top rung (Davidai & Gilovich, 2015; Kraus, 2015; Kraus & Tan, 2015).

Note that this is exactly what social dominance theorists would expect: Beliefs in meritocracy, in a just world, and in pronounced mobility make it easier for all of us to accept the inequalities we see around us and they remove any incentive to challenge the social, cultural, and political systems that produce them. Note that these beliefs need not be consciously held to make us blind or indifferent to the pervasive inequalities in the world.

Justifying Status Differences Through Dehumanization

To become comfortable with pronounced group differences in wealth, status, and opportunity is to believe that those at the bottom are not as deserving as those at the top are. Embracing meritocracy and believing in a just world enable that stance. An even more powerful way of becoming comfortable with inequality and untroubled by the condition of disadvantaged groups is to dehumanize them. Dehumanization is the conviction, conscious or not, that someone or some group of people lacks the complex emotions and capacity for agency that are characteristic of humanity. Nonhumans are thought to experience simple emotions like anger or happiness but not complex emotions like shame or nostalgia. And other organisms are granted some degree of cognition but are not imagined to be capable of detailed planning or complex thought.

Both history and psychological research make it clear that dehumanization is common and tragic (Kteily & Bruneau, 2017). Sustained efforts to deny the humanity of outgroups have preceded some of the worst episodes of genocidal violence in modern times. The Nazis likened Jews to vermin before and during World War II (6 million killed); the Khmer Rouge depicted their enemies as worms (between 1.5 and 3 million killed); the Hutus of Rwanda referred to the Tutsis as cockroaches (over half a million killed).

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DEHUMANIZATION Many people dehumanize those experiencing homelessness, such as those in this encampment on a city street in Los Angeles, California.

In a telling neuroimaging study of dehumanization, participants were shown images of members of a number of different groups while in an fMRI machine. When they were exposed to individuals from most groups, their brain scans revealed activation in an area associated with social cognition—the medial prefrontal cortex. But activation in that area was notably absent when participants were shown images of objects or people from notable outgroups, such as people who are homeless or addicted to drugs (L. T. Harris & Fiske, 2006). As shocking as it may seem, many people apparently don’t think of individuals from such groups as being fully human.

When are people inclined to dehumanize others? One way to get a handle on that question is to note that dehumanization is essentially the opposite of anthropomorphism, or the attribution of human qualities to nonhuman entities. If you’ve played or worked with a robot, it has probably seemed human to you at times, and you’ve probably thought of the virtual assistant on your smartphone—Alexa, Siri, or whom(!)ever—in human terms sometimes as well. Adam Waytz, Nick Epley, and John Cacioppo (2010) have argued that we tend to anthropomorphize things to the extent that they resemble human beings: We’re more likely to anthropomorphize a robot than a toaster, more likely to anthropomorphize a mammal than an arachnid.

Waytz and colleagues also noted that we’re more likely to anthropomorphize when we’re feeling in need of social connection. Anyone who’s seen the film *Cast Away* immediately grasps why the character played by Tom Hanks, all alone on a remote island, gives his volleyball the name “Wilson” and treats it like a person. Finally, we anthropomorphize when we’re feeling generally helpless or ineffective because doing so can lend a sense of order and predictability to the world around us. Random acts and outcomes can seem more predictable, or potentially more predictable at least, if we imagine that there is someone responsible for them. As Waytz and colleagues noted, the World Meteorological Organization maintains that assigning human names to storms, hurricanes, and typhoons facilitates the kind of effective communication needed to prepare the public for these often life-threatening events.

Turning this around, we should expect people to be more likely to dehumanize those they think of as different from themselves. Indeed, immigrants are particularly vulnerable to dehumanization (Kteily & Bruneau, 2017), and the historical record provides abundant evidence of people dehumanizing other racial, ethnic, and religious groups—the conquest of the Americas, the colonization of Africa, the Armenian genocide, the enduring discrimination against the Roma throughout Europe, just to name a few. We should also expect people to dehumanize others when they are feeling strongly connected to their own ingroup and see it as distinct from various outgroups. Here, too, history teaches us that strong feelings of ingroup loyalty can foster an atmosphere that gives rise to brutal dehumanization, such as the strong ethnic connection among Rwanda’ s Hutus that fed their genocide of their Tutsi neighbors. Additional support for this idea comes from a study in which participants who were led to feel socially connected (by thinking about a Thanksgiving dinner and the people there they felt closest to) were more likely to deny distinctly human mental states to others and to endorse the torture of those involved in the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States (Waytz & Epley, 2012). Finally, we should expect people to be more likely to dehumanize others when they see the world as chaotic and threatening. This also turns out to be the case: The historical record testifies to the tight connection between dehumanization and periods of turmoil and conflict (Kteily et al., 2015).

What lessons can we learn from the study of dehumanization? Most important, we should be alarmed whenever we hear dehumanizing language, especially from powerful leaders with committed constituencies during times of uncertainty and strife. When Zsolt Bayer, cofounder of Hungary’ s right-wing Fidesz party, says that “These Roma are animals . . . inarticulate sounds pour out of their bestial skulls. . . . [They] shouldn’ t be allowed to exist,” we might be tempted to dismiss his comments as “just words” (Brown, 2013). It’ s tempting to react that way as well when Donald Trump says of migrants, “These aren’ t people, they are animals” (Agence France-Presse, 2018). But words matter. The use of homophobic epithets, for example, encourages the dehumanizing of LGBTQ people (Fasoli et al., 2015). We therefore dismiss the impact of such language at our moral peril because that sort of dehumanizing vocabulary has been a prelude to some of history’ s worst episodes of outgroup-directed violence.

And we know better. As easy as it may be to mindlessly think of others as less than fully human, there’ s no denying that we are part of the broad human family. When we hear dehumanizing language, it should sound an alarm that someone is trying to manipulate us by appealing to our baser impulses.

LOOKING BACK

Social dominance theory is based on the observation that all societies are at least partly hierarchical and it tries to explain how those hierarchies are maintained. Especially common and important are individual and institutional discrimination. What social dominance theorists call legitimizing myths—such as the belief in a strict meritocracy, a just world, and pronounced mobility—also help preserve existing hierarchies by making people less troubled by any inequalities they experience or observe. Dehumanizing marginalized groups also makes it easier to accept the hierarchical system that contributes to their marginalization.

Glossary

social dominance theory

A theory about the hierarchical nature of societies, how they remain stable, and how more powerful or privileged groups in a society maintain their advantage.

social dominance orientation

A personality trait that corresponds to a person’s support for socioeconomic hierarchy and the belief that different groups should occupy higher and lower positions in society.

just world hypothesis

The belief that people get what they deserve in life and deserve what they get.

dehumanization

The attribution of nonhuman characteristics and denial of human qualities to groups (generally to groups other than one’ s own).

anthropomorphism

The attribution of human traits, feelings, and intentions to nonhuman entities.

The Stereotype Content Model

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify the two important dimensions underlying different stereotypes around the world and the common emotional reactions to individuals who occupy different positions on those dimensions.
- Describe the nature of ambivalent prejudices.

Understanding what it’s like to live in a prejudiced world requires an understanding of the content of the stereotypes people hold. Stereotypes differ in many ways, of course, depending on whether they pertain to the young or old, immigrants from Asia or Latin America, Buddhists or Evangelical Christians, rural Whites or urban Blacks, boomers or Gen Z. But despite all the variability inherent in the most widely shared stereotypes, the stereotypes people hold tend to adhere to an underlying structure, a structure described by Susan Fiske and her colleagues in their stereotype content model (Cuddy et al., 2008, 2009; Fiske et al., 2002). The stereotype content model posits that the nature of different stereotypes varies systematically depending on how the groups in question are evaluated on the dimensions of warmth and competence. These two dimensions figure so prominently in people’s thoughts and feelings because they correspond to two considerations that are key to our survival. First, we need to understand a person or group’s likely intentions. Friend or foe? Likely to provide benefits or inflict harm? This understanding reflects our assessment of the person or group’s warmth, which depends on whether we judge them to be moral, trustworthy, kind, friendly, and so on. Moral and kind people aren’t likely to hurt us. Second, we need to know whether someone is able to act on their kind or malevolent intentions. That is, we need to know whether the friend or foe is competent or not, which depends on whether we judge them to be intelligent, determined, creative, and so on. A competent friend is a treasure; a competent foe is a potential danger.

Assessments along these two dimensions create a conceptual space, depicted in **Figure 11.1**, that allows us to organize how different groups in society tend to be seen. Figure 11.1 and others like it are based on the responses of participants who have been asked, to encourage honest responding, how they believe *others* view these groups (after being cautioned, “We are not interested in your personal opinions”). The responses here reflect the views of U.S. participants, but similar studies have been conducted with respondents around the globe. Groups that are viewed most positively are thought to be seen as both warm and competent (Black professionals, the Irish, Americans generally, for example) and tend to be admired. Those viewed most negatively, as lacking in both warmth and competence (poor people, the homeless), tend to be viewed with contempt.

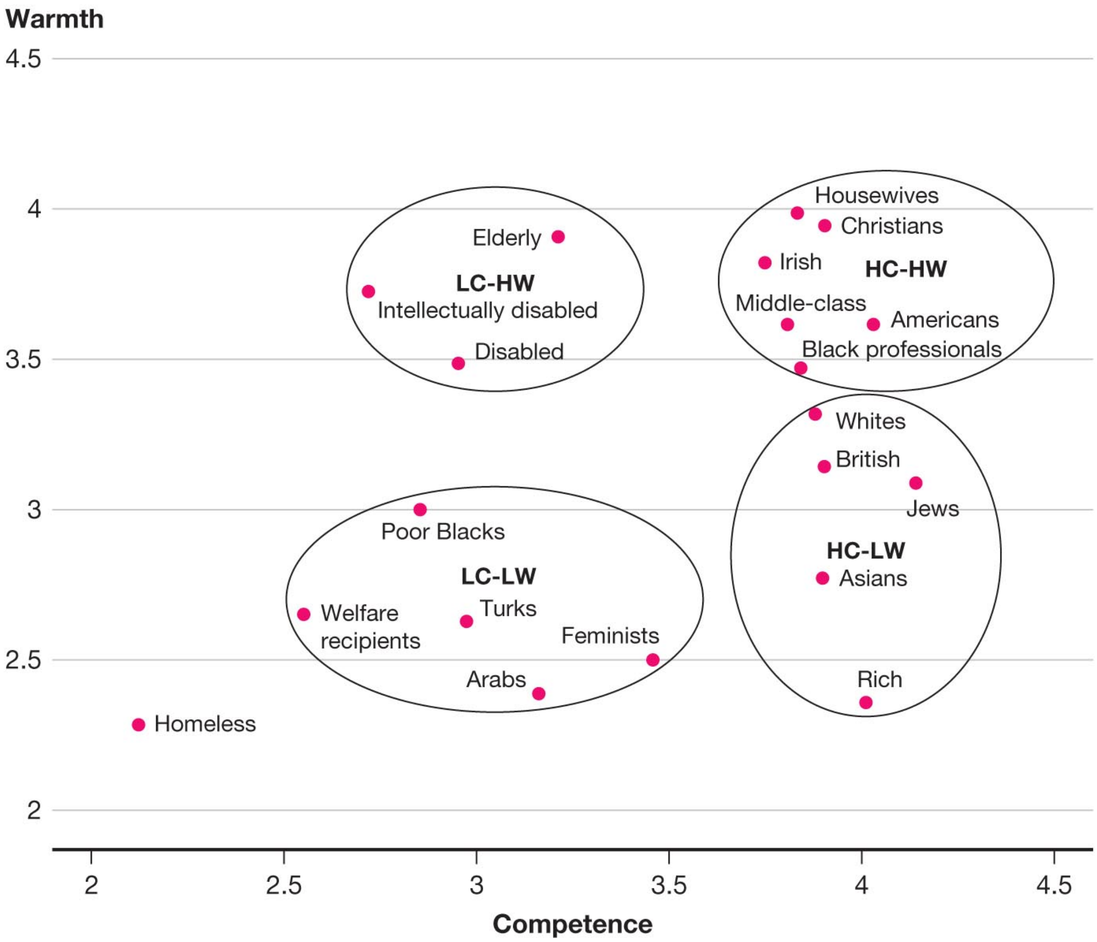


FIGURE 11.1 **STEREOTYPE CONTENT MODEL** The stereotype content model organizes common stereotypes according to different groups' reputations for being competent and warm. The data shown here are derived from responses of a representative sample of adult Americans. (LC = low competence; HC = high competence; LW = low warmth; HW = high warmth) Source: Adapted from Cuddy et al., 2007.

One notable feature of the stereotype content model is that it calls attention to a number of "ambivalent" stereotypes about groups that are seen as high on one dimension but low on the other. Those seen as high in competence but low in warmth (Asians, the British) tend to be envied, whereas those seen as high in warmth but low in competence (older adults, people with disabilities) tend to be pitied. When European respondents are asked about prevailing stereotypes of the different nations in the European Union, a remarkable percentage fall in the two ambivalent quadrants (see **Figure 11.2**). As one observer summarized it, the Germans love the Italians but don’t respect them, and the Italians respect the Germans but don’t love them (Landler, 2003).

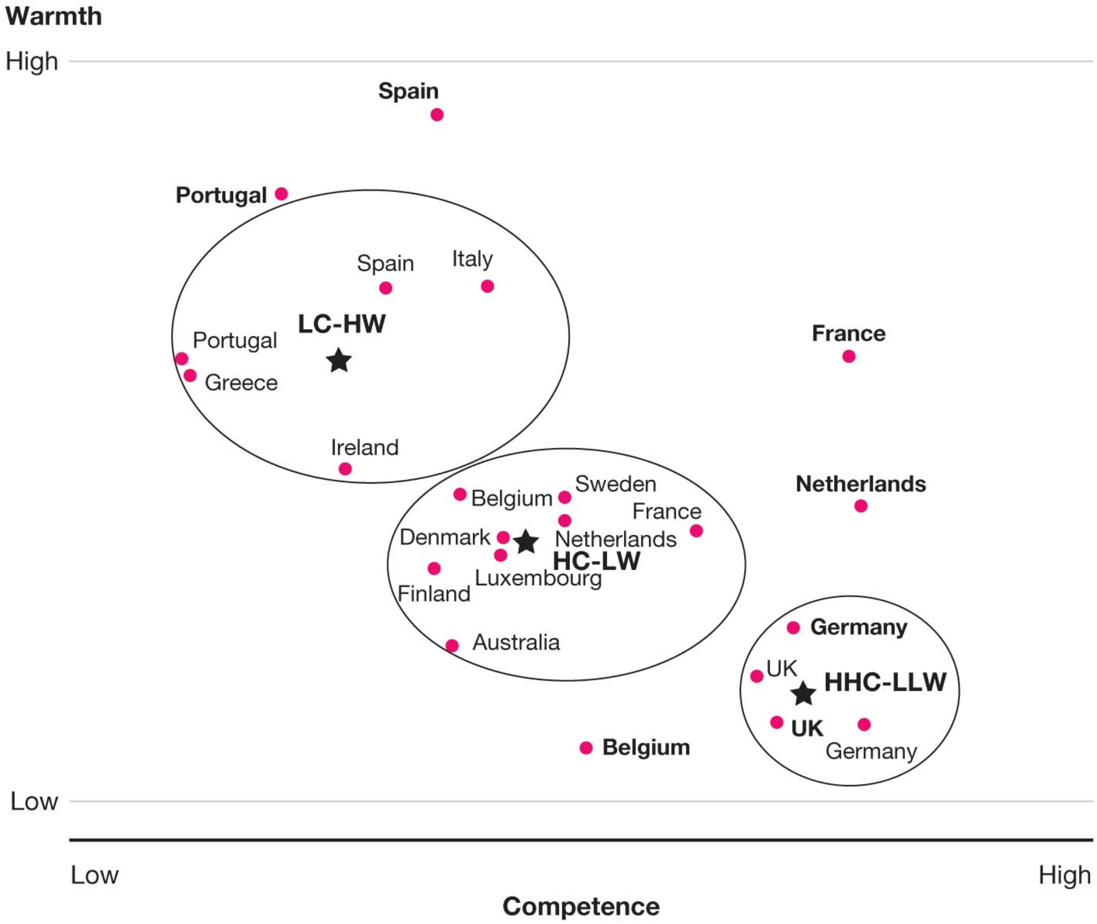


FIGURE 11.2 **STEREOTYPES OF EUROPEAN NATIONS** How members of European nations view one another, as laid out in the stereotype content model’s warmth/competence space. Stars represent the center of each cluster. The boldface names of countries represent how the citizens of those countries are seen by those citizens themselves; names not in boldface represent how the citizens of those countries are seen by other Europeans. Note that the Irish are viewed more favorably (as more competent) by Americans, as seen in Figure 11.1, than by Europeans, as seen in this figure.

(LC = low competence; HC = high competence; LW = low warmth; HW = high warmth; HHC- LLW = highest competence/lowest warmth) Source: Adapted from Cuddy et al., 2009.

A similar ambivalence arises with gender stereotypes. As we discussed in Chapter 10, “benevolent” sexism derives from one especially prominent ambivalent stereotype that emphasizes women’s expected warmth and creates something of a “double bind” for women in leadership positions in the workforce. Leaders need to be seen as competent, but when women act in ways that signal competence, they risk being seen as insufficiently warm and hence at variance with the female stereotype. They may be criticized for being “imperious” or “strident” for the same behavior that is approved of or goes unnoticed in men. As one female CEO put it, “A man can be as hostile as he wants and be accepted; if I put someone on hold I’m regarded as aggressive.” But when women in charge act in ways that signal warmth, they risk being seen as insufficiently competent and hence not fit to be a leader (Heilman, 2001; Rudman & Glick, 2001). This dilemma arises in especially pointed fashion when female political candidates (such as Hillary Clinton during her pursuit of the presidency in 2016) debate male opponents (such as then-candidate Donald Trump). The role of “leader” calls for being strong and assertive, whereas the role of “woman” calls for being warm and nurturing. The more a female candidate conveys strength in a debate, the more she’s seen as lacking in the warmth the electorate expects of women. But the more she conveys warmth, the more she risks being seen as insufficiently strong and decisive. Some campaign insiders have proposed that one way out of this bind is for female candidates to project strength on behalf of others (for the middle class, for military families), a more communally oriented and hence warmer strength.

But why are some groups seen as competent and others not, and some warm and others not? The stereotype content model is helpful here, too, positing that allies are generally thought to be warm and competitors to be cold and that people high in status are generally thought to be competent and those low in status to be less competent. We have warm, fuzzy feelings toward allies and members of our ingroups because they “have our backs” and we can count on them to treat us well. People don’t assume the same about outgroups and, especially, competitors. High-status individuals are seen as competent both because their privileged position often comes with resources that actually make them competent and because, as we saw with social dominance theory, people tend to hold meritocratic beliefs that simply assume competence on the part of high-status individuals.

Support for these ideas comes in two forms. First, in surveys that ask respondents to rate different groups on warmth, competence, status, and competitiveness, there are strong positive associations between the ratings of competence and status and negative associations between the ratings of competence and warmth (Cuddy et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 2002). Second, when participants read about a (fictitious) immigrant group and are asked to rate the group on warmth and competence, the group is seen as warm (but not necessarily competent) if its members emigrated from a country whose citizens are thought to be cooperative, and it is seen as competent (but not necessarily warm) if its members tended to be economically successful in their country of origin (Caprariello, Cuddy, & Fiske, 2009).

Stereotypes of the Rich and Poor in a Polarized World of Increasing Economic Inequality

Stereotypes of “the poor” tend to be highly variable, in part because people have more favorable attitudes toward “the working poor” than they do toward, say, people described as homeless or on welfare. That difference is but one reflection of the fact that individuals with lower socioeconomic status (SES) are sometimes viewed with contempt (lower left quadrant in Figure 11.1) but more often with a paternalistic sympathy (upper left quadrant). In the latter, relatively common view, lower-SES individuals are seen as low in competence but high in warmth. The extent to which lower-SES individuals are viewed with contempt or condescension is influenced by the level of income inequality in society. People in more unequal societies are especially likely to see lower-SES individuals as lacking competence (Durante, Tablante, & Fiske, 2017). Note that this tendency fits the tenets of social dominance theory because it serves to rationalize existing economic disparities: Those lower on the economic totem pole are seen as deserving of their place because they lack competence.

Just as the stereotype content model sheds light on the nature of widespread stereotypes about the poor, it also helps us understand the nature of the prejudices people have toward the wealthy or “elites” more broadly. To be elite is to be at the top of one hierarchy or another, and those who are at the top tend to be seen as competent but cold. This is especially true of the rich, who tend to be granted credit for their wealth but who are not seen as especially warm or moral. Although philanthropic efforts can make wealthy donors seem warm and altruistic, they don’t much change people’s assessments of the wealthy in general. As one of the most well-known passages in the Bible has it, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:24).

Politicians also score low on the warmth dimension, largely because they are not seen as trustworthy (S. T. Fiske, 2019). They don’t inspire much trust for several reasons: (1) they are often seen as captives of the rich, a view that has strengthened over time as lobbying efforts have become more sophisticated, more intense, and more incestuous, with retired politicians themselves lobbying their former colleagues in government; (2) the compromises politicians often have to make to get legislation passed can make them seem unprincipled; and (3) people recognize that politicians' first order of business is to get elected, which can conflict with looking after the country's or even their local constituents' best interests.

COMPETENT BUT COLD? Wealthy people, and members of the "elite" more generally, are often viewed as highly competent but lacking warmth.

Some of the ire that has long been directed at politicians and the wealthy is increasingly directed at formerly esteemed elite institutions and professions—scientists, the news media, universities, even health professionals. The "Varsity Blues" scandal, in which members of the Hollywood elite were found guilty of bribing university officials to grant admission to their children, furthered people’s sense (if not outright conviction) that “the system” is rigged. People tend to trust science because of its emphasis on impartiality, but even that has been called into question more and more in our increasingly polarized climate. In addition, the detached deliberation that scientists strive for can ironically make them seem less trustworthy. People who take their time arriving at a moral course of action, for example, are viewed with greater suspicion than are those who get there more quickly (Critcher, Inbar, & Pizarro, 2013). People also prefer to work and interact with those whose moral choices are grounded in intuition as opposed to rational deliberation (Everett, Pizarro, & Crockett, 2016). The careful deliberation so important to the conduct of sound science often involves detailed, time-consuming calculation, and people are suspicious of anyone they consider “calculating.”

The stereotypes that people higher and lower on the socioeconomic ladder have of one another can also negatively affect their interactions with each other, furthering mutual discomfort and suspicion. Working-class individuals, for example, often worry that elites question their competence, so they seek respect when interacting with higher-SES individuals. But they often fail to get it because higher-SES individuals, focused on not appearing cold, come across as patronizing and condescending. This makes working-class individuals feel disrespected, which can cause resentment (S. T. Fiske, 2019). This dynamic feeds the emotionally charged polarization that we now see across much of the world, which is reflected in the trucker protests in Canada and the United States, the yellow vest movement in France, and the rise of populist movements in democracies around the globe.

LOOKING BACK

People and groups tend to be evaluated along the two dimensions of competence and warmth. Groups that are seen as both warm and competent are admired, those seen as cold and incompetent are viewed with disgust or contempt, those seen as warm but incompetent are pitied, and those seen as cold but competent are envied and resented. Understanding the two-dimensional structure of stereotypes helps explain how interactions between different groups often play out and can shed light on the populist, anti-elite sentiments that are currently increasing around the globe.

Glossary

stereotype content model

A model that describes the nature of common group stereotypes, positing that they vary along the two prominent dimensions of warmth and competence.

The Effects of Stereotypes and Prejudice on the Individual

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify some of the most common ways that members of marginalized groups are mistreated by members of dominant groups.
- Identify ways in which overarching social, economic, and legal systems advantage some groups and disadvantage others.
- Explain how certain kinds of omissions can disadvantage certain groups.

Social dominance theory posits that although some members of dominant groups will devote considerable energy and resources to making the world more equitable, dominant groups as a whole tend to act in ways that maintain their advantage. As the comedian Mel Brooks said in his satirical film *History of the World, Part I*, “It’s good to be the king.” Efforts to perpetuate the existing system, as we noted earlier, take the form of individual discrimination, institutional discrimination, and behavioral asymmetries. When we combine social dominance theory with some of the specific tenets of the stereotype content model, we can gain insight into exactly how social and economic imbalances are preserved.

Individual Discrimination and Direct Mistreatment

Instances of active prejudice and discrimination against members of nondominant groups tend to command our attention (and receive the most media scrutiny) and are therefore the most familiar to most people. We therefore begin this section by discussing some of the most common forms of prejudice and discrimination that involve acts of *commission*—that is, individuals engaging in actions that disadvantage or harm members of certain groups. We then discuss ways in which members of certain groups are disadvantaged through omissions—the absence of things, such as resources, opportunities, or mere attention, that are available to members of dominant groups.

BIAS IN LAW ENFORCEMENT In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, awareness of police misconduct against people of color has increased. **Figure 11.3** presents data on the demographic breakdown of police killings in the United States, showing that Black American, Indigenous American, and Hispanic individuals are killed by police more often than members of other groups are. Although the killing of Black Americans by police has gone down steadily over the past 50 years, Black Americans have nevertheless been the victims of 26 percent of recent police killings, although they make up only 13 percent of the U.S. population. Indigenous Americans make up only 0.8 percent of the population but are the victims of 1.9 percent of police killings (Males, 2014).

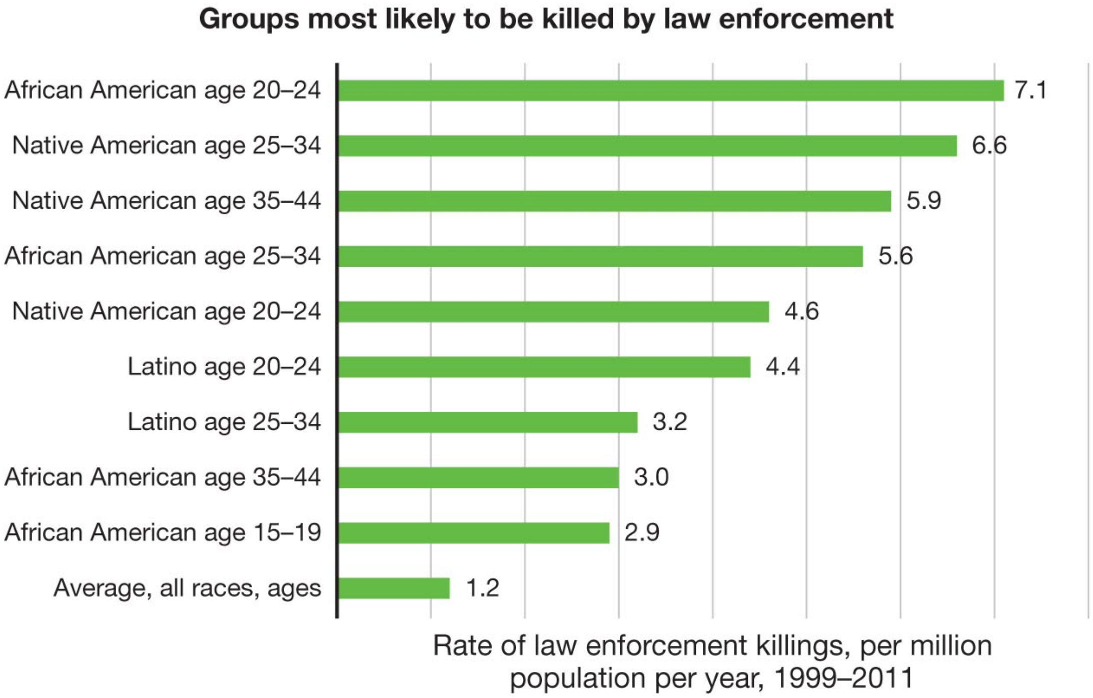
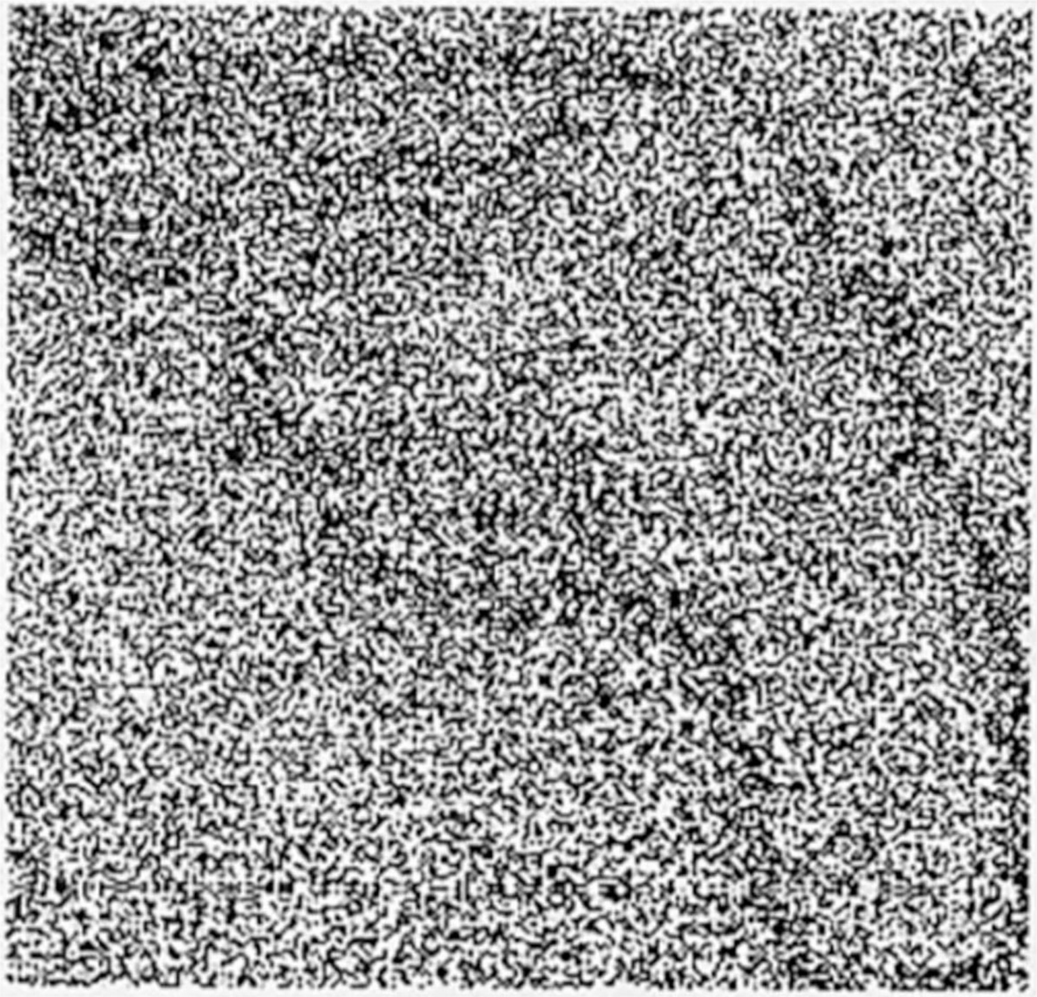


FIGURE 11.3 **KILLINGS BY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS** Members of some demographic groups are killed by police in proportionally greater numbers than members of other groups.

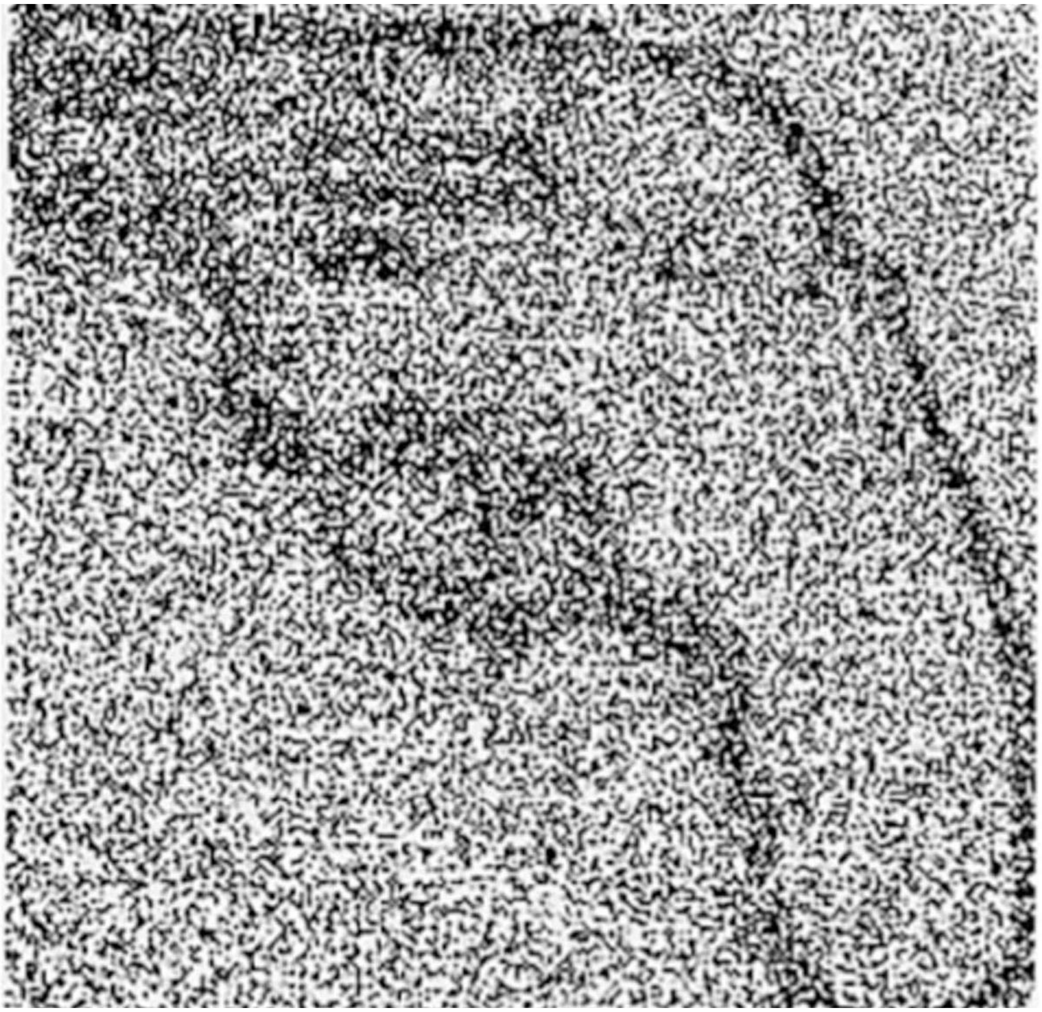
These are pure demographic statistics, of course, so their interpretation must be guided by the usual caution accompanying any correlational result. But social psychologists go beyond such demographics to try to understand the extent to which they reflect police bias by both conducting finer analyses and carrying out controlled experiments. For example, an analysis of policing in Oakland, California, found that 60 percent of police stops involved Black Americans even though only 28 percent of the population of Oakland is Black—a result that, crucially, held after controlling for more than two dozen variables potentially related to the decision to stop someone, such as the crime rate and demographic composition of the specific location where the stop occurred (Hetey et al., 2016). In an even more telling sign that some police interactions with Black individuals might start off in a biased fashion before ending in tragedy, an analysis of the speech recorded from body cameras revealed that law enforcement officers, both Black and White, used more respectful language (“Have a safe night”; “Sorry to stop you”) when speaking to White motorists than when speaking to Black motorists (Voigt et al., 2017).

Social psychologists have also utilized their favorite tool, the randomized controlled experiment, to examine the extent to which preexisting stereotypes of Black Americans as more likely to cause “trouble” or engage in crime might channel police officers’ or other establishment figures’ interactions with Black people down a troublesome path. In one study, educators watched a videotape of preschool children engaged in typical classroom activities. Some were told to expect to see some challenging behavior on the part of some of the students; others weren’t given this instruction. Those led to expect trouble spent more time looking at the Black children, especially the Black boys, than those not told to look for signs of trouble (Gilliam et al., 2016).

In another controlled experiment that highlighted the biasing effects of the stereotype that links Black people with crime, participants were shown a series of degraded images of various objects, starting with one so fuzzy that it was nearly impossible to decipher and then gradually proceeding to clearer images. Some of the images, like the gun shown in **Figure 11.4**, were crime-related, and others were not, and the participants’ task was to signal as soon as they recognized what the gradually clarified image depicted.



(A)



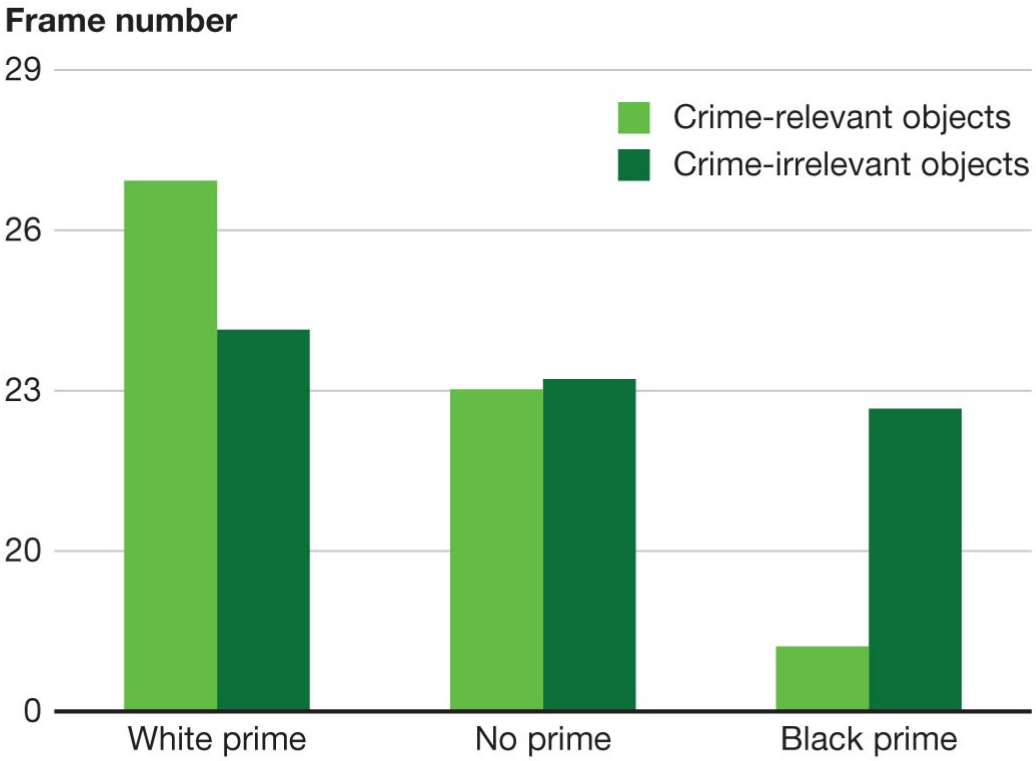


FIGURE 11.4 **STEREOTYPES AND BIASED PERCEPTION** (A) A degraded image of an object (Frame 1), gradually becoming clearer (Frames 20 and 41). How quickly would participants realize that the object, in this case, was a gun? (B) This graph shows how long it took participants to recognize the object (i.e., the frame number when they indicated that they knew what it was) when it was related to criminality or not and when the presentation of the object was preceded by a series of White faces, Black faces, or a non-face line drawing. The participants recognized the crime-related objects more quickly when they had just seen a series of Black faces. Source: Adapted from Eberhardt et al., 2004.

Before doing so, participants were primed with a series of Black faces, White faces, or meaningless line drawings. As you can see in Figure 11.4, being primed with Black faces led the participants to detect the crime-related objects, but not the other objects, more readily (Eberhardt et al., 2004). The Black/crime stereotype thus guided participants’ attention—a result that is unlikely to come as a surprise to most Black people. This finding has implications for how Black people’s interactions with others, including those with the police, can play out.

BIAS IN HIRING Members of marginalized groups also aren’t treated as well as dominant-group members are in the workplace. When researchers submit applications for job openings—some with stereotypically Black names (Lakisha, Jamal) and others with stereotypically White names (Emily, Greg)—the former receive fewer follow-ups for interviews than the latter do. In one of the earliest and best-known studies of this type, applications with stereotypically White names received 50 percent more callbacks than those with Black names did (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). Subsequent studies have established that some of this difference is due to the stereotypically Black names being associated with lower social socioeconomic status (Simonsohn, 2016), itself a source of hiring bias (Rivera & Tilcsik, 2016).

Other studies using this experimental paradigm have uncovered bias against applicants with foreign-sounding names in Canada (Oreopoulos, 2011), Turkish-sounding names in Germany (Kass & Manger, 2012), and Chinese, Italian, Middle Eastern, and Indigenous Australian names in Australia (Booth, Leigh, & Varganova, 2012), as well as bias against applicants in the United States who listed Muslim student organizations on their résumés (Wright et al., 2013). In contrast to the consistent evidence of bias against members of racial and ethnic minority groups, attempts to assess gender bias and bias against members of sexual minority groups have yielded mixed and equivocal evidence of discrimination (Bertrand & Duflo, 2016; Quadlin, 2018), with some studies actually indicating preferential treatment for women (Veit et al., 2022; W. M. Williams & Ceci, 2015).

BIAS IN WHAT IS ABSENT OR WITHHELD When we think about prejudice directed at members of particular groups, we usually think of active mistreatment—using ethnic slurs, for instance, or being more likely to suspend a Hispanic student from school or to pull over a person of color in a traffic stop. But harm can also result from what people *don't* do—from omissions as well as commission. This is clearest when it comes to attention. It's painful when people don't grant us their attention (K. D. Williams, 2007), and members of marginalized groups often find that the world does not pay as much attention to them as it does to members of more dominant groups. We saw in Chapter 9 that unattractive people struggle to be recognized, as do obese individuals, older adults, and people with disabilities. Not only do individuals who belong to these groups have to live in a world where they don't attract as much attention as their peers do, but they also must watch as others actively turn their attention away from them. Former U.S. senator Robert Dole experienced this vividly after returning from Germany in World War II with severe injuries that left him without the use of his right hand and with only limited use of his left. When he attended events in uniform, people treated him as the war hero he was; when he went out in public without his uniform, people treated him as an invalid, often turning away from him.

BOX 11.1

FOCUS ON THE HALF-LIFE OF PREJUDICE

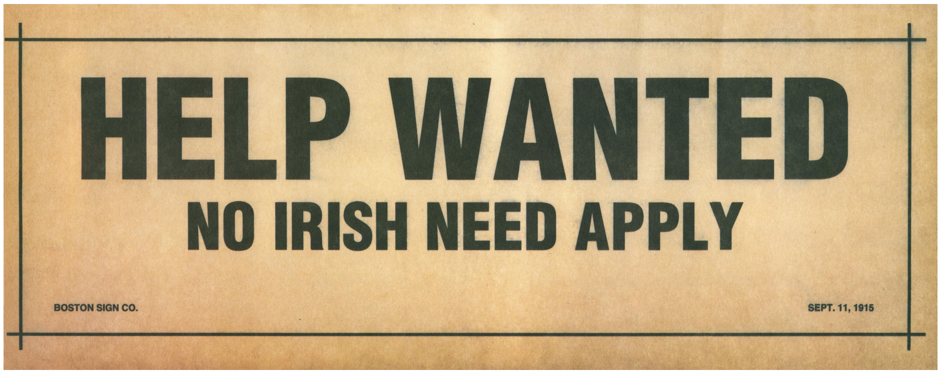
No Irish Need Apply

You are well aware that attitudes toward Black people in the United States have changed over the past two centuries—and are changing still. But did you know that Americans have had many ethnic prejudices that have been greatly mitigated or eliminated over time?

Beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, Irish people—who were treated little if any better by the British than Black people were treated in the United States at the time—began coming to the United States by the millions to escape the hunger caused by the potato famine. They had not been here long before extreme stereotyping and prejudice began. The Irish had little schooling; fewer than half of adults could read. Alcoholism and spousal abuse were common among Irish men, knife fights were ordinary occurrences, and people lived in squalor in the cities, often sharing their house with their cattle. Houses owned by Irish people were called “shanties.” The slang term “Paddy wagons” (for police vans) was coined from “Paddy,” a pet name for an Irish person called Patrick. Depictions of Irishmen in newspaper cartoons often looked more like apes than humans. Well into the twentieth century, it was common for job postings to include the sentence “No Irish need apply.” Sometimes, there was an addition: “Colored man preferred.” And in fact, free Black people in northern cities were preferred to the Irish both as employees and neighbors. Over time, however, the lives of the Irish improved. But it wasn’t until around the time that John F. Kennedy was elected president (the first Irish American to hold that office) that the old stereotypes largely disappeared. There’s a good chance that a number of your classmates are of Irish descent. This would likely be of little import or interest to you; indeed, it might even be of little import to your Irish American classmates.

The story of the Irish has been repeated many times. In the late nineteenth century, the Irish, along with the Italians, Poles, and Jews, were not regarded as White by many people. (A book published in 1995 had the title, written only slightly tongue in cheek, *How the Irish Became White*.) In the Upper Midwest, the phrase “dumb Swede” was heard in every community until at least the middle of the twentieth century. Do the Swedes’ descendants today know about this?

Was every group of immigrants treated so badly? Not at all. Germans, English, and the Dutch, mostly middle class, were quickly stirred into the melting pot. But remember that the Statue of Liberty stands next to Ellis Island in New York, where millions of immigrants entered the country. There is a poem by Emma Lazarus at the base of the statue. It does not say, “Welcome all you cultivated, skilled people.” The poem reads, “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” A lot of people so described came to the United States, and they turned themselves into prototypical Americans. It sometimes just took a while.



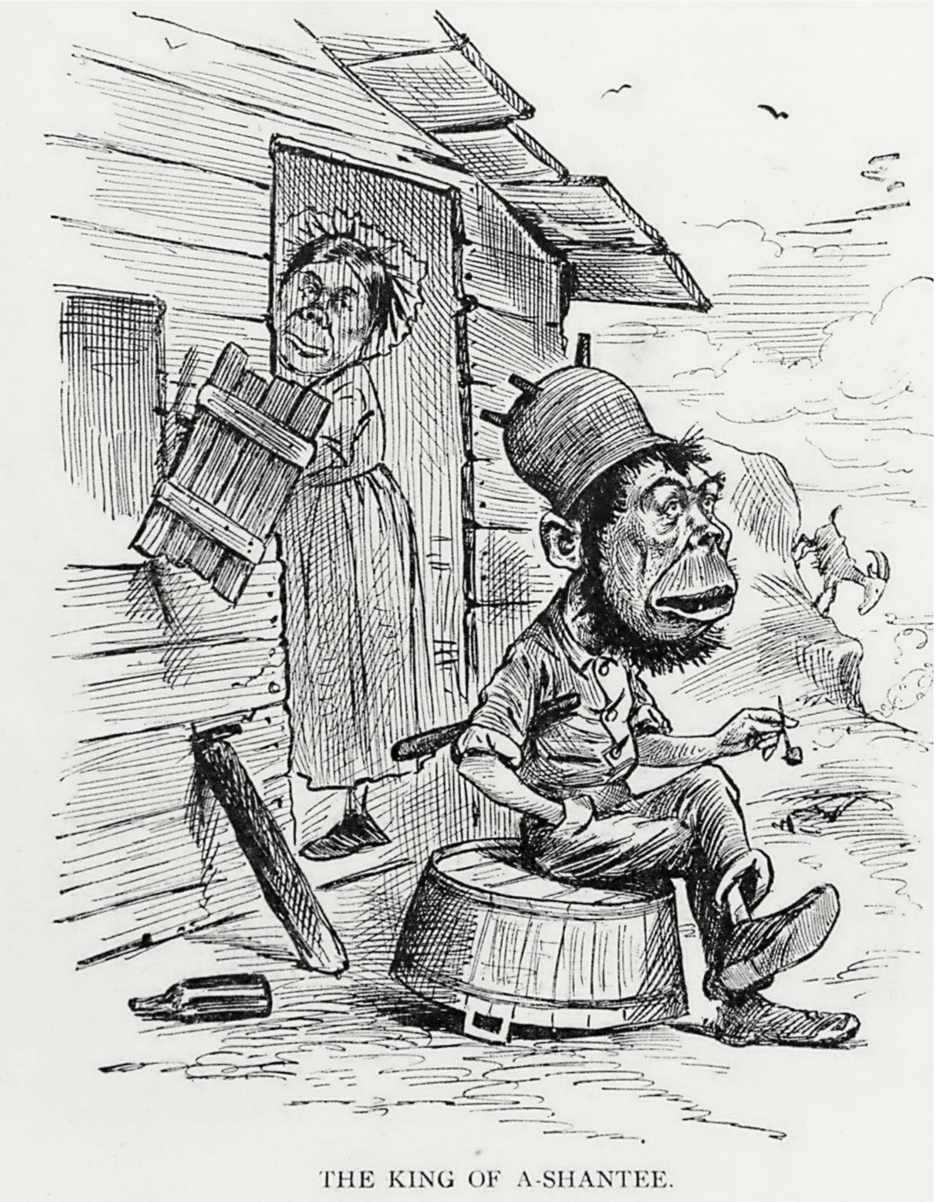
HELP WANTED

NO IRISH NEED APPLY

BOSTON SIGN CO.

SEPT. 11, 1915

(A)



THE KING OF A-SHANTEE.

(B)

PREJUDICE AGAINST IRISH AMERICANS (A) A help-wanted ad in Boston, MA, from 1918. (B) A cartoon from 1882 depicting an Irish couple with ape-like features.

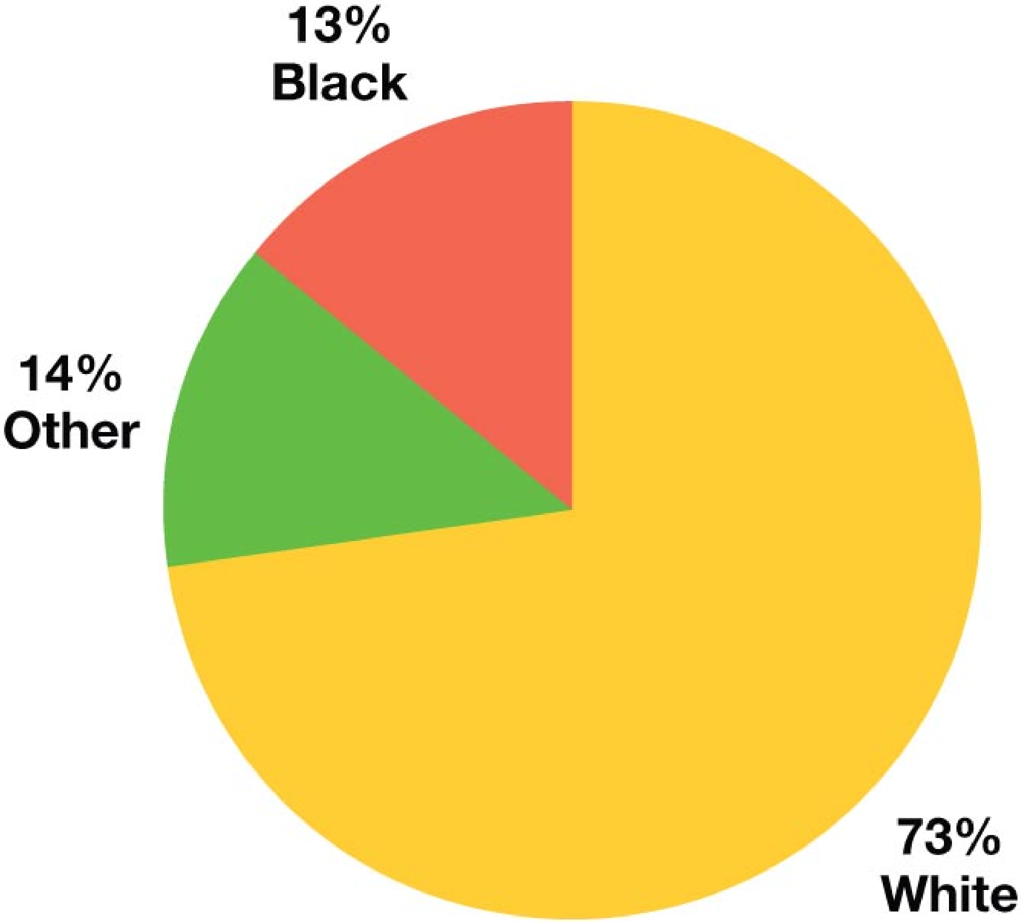
The pain of others’ inattention is familiar to people with “intersectional” identities—that is, those who have multiple nondominant identities. As we noted in Chapter 10, no one is simply Asian: One is an Asian man, woman, or nonbinary person; upper, middle, or working class; straight, gay, bisexual, or asexual; and so on. Valerie Purdie-Vaughns and Richard Eibach (2008) have argued that individuals who have multiple nondominant identities tend to be relatively invisible to others because they are not prototypical members of their different identity groups, and people tend to think in terms of prototypes. This is reflected in the Black feminist slogan that captures so much of Black women’s experience trying to promote social justice: “All the women are White and all the Blacks are men.” The voices and images of Black women, in other words, tend to be especially underrepresented.

In one study that illustrates this tendency, participants were first shown photos of the faces of Black and White men and women. After a brief delay, they were then shown all the photos a second time, interspersed with photos they hadn’t seen (foils), and asked whether they had seen each photo before. Consistent with the idea that intersectional individuals can be relatively invisible, the photos of Black women were significantly less likely to be recognized than any of the other types of photos. A follow-up study examined participants’ memories of the comments made in a simulated group discussion and similarly found that participants were less likely to correctly tie the comments made by the Black women to the women who said them (Sesko & Biernat, 2010). Studies like these lend credence to intersectional individuals’ reports that they feel more invisible to others and that they have received more discriminatory treatment (at work and in stores and restaurants) because of their identities (Remedios & Snyder, 2018).

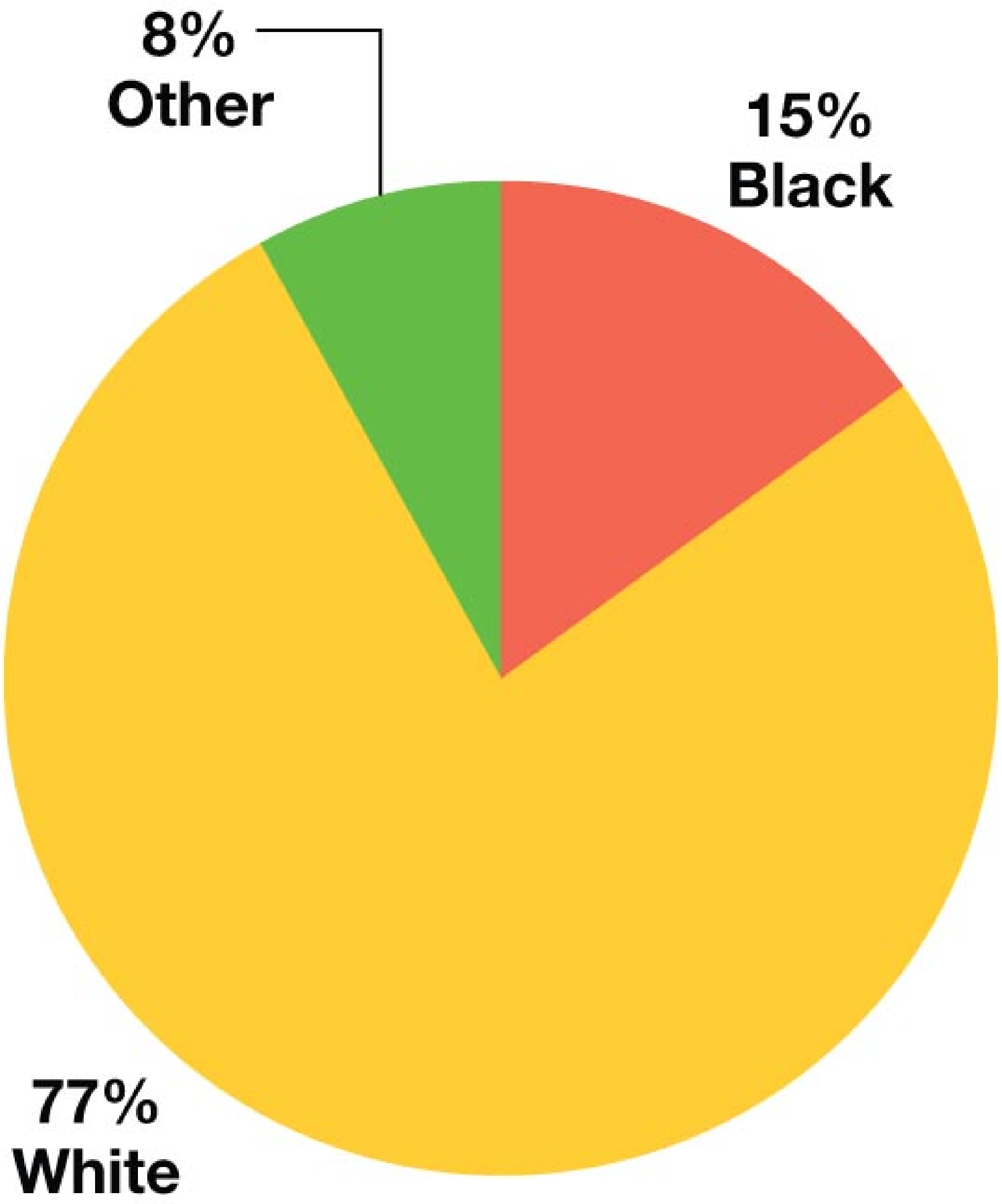
Institutional Discrimination and Life in a Harsher World

Members of marginalized groups also face challenges that stem not from direct mistreatment by others but from systemic inequities that can make life seem like an unending uphill struggle (Salter, Adams, & Perez, 2018). When a severe heat wave struck Portland, Oregon, in the summer of 2021, for example, the ambient temperature in the poorer neighborhoods of East Portland, which are populated mostly by people of color, was 9 degrees Fahrenheit (5 degrees Celsius) hotter than the city average and 25 degrees Fahrenheit (14 degrees Celsius) (!) hotter than the leafier, more upscale neighborhoods of Northwest Portland (Peel, 2021). Parks are more likely to be located in higher-income areas of a town, and highways and industrial sites are more common in lower-income areas, making the latter neighborhoods much warmer during heat waves. Indeed, a systematic analysis of summertime temperatures in urban areas across the United States found that surface temperatures were, on average, 4.7 degrees Fahrenheit (2.6 degrees Celsius) higher in lower-income neighborhoods (Hoffman, Shandas, & Pendleton, 2020). As a consequence, when a heat wave strikes today, the poor have to ride it out in a substantially hotter environment than their wealthier neighbors do.

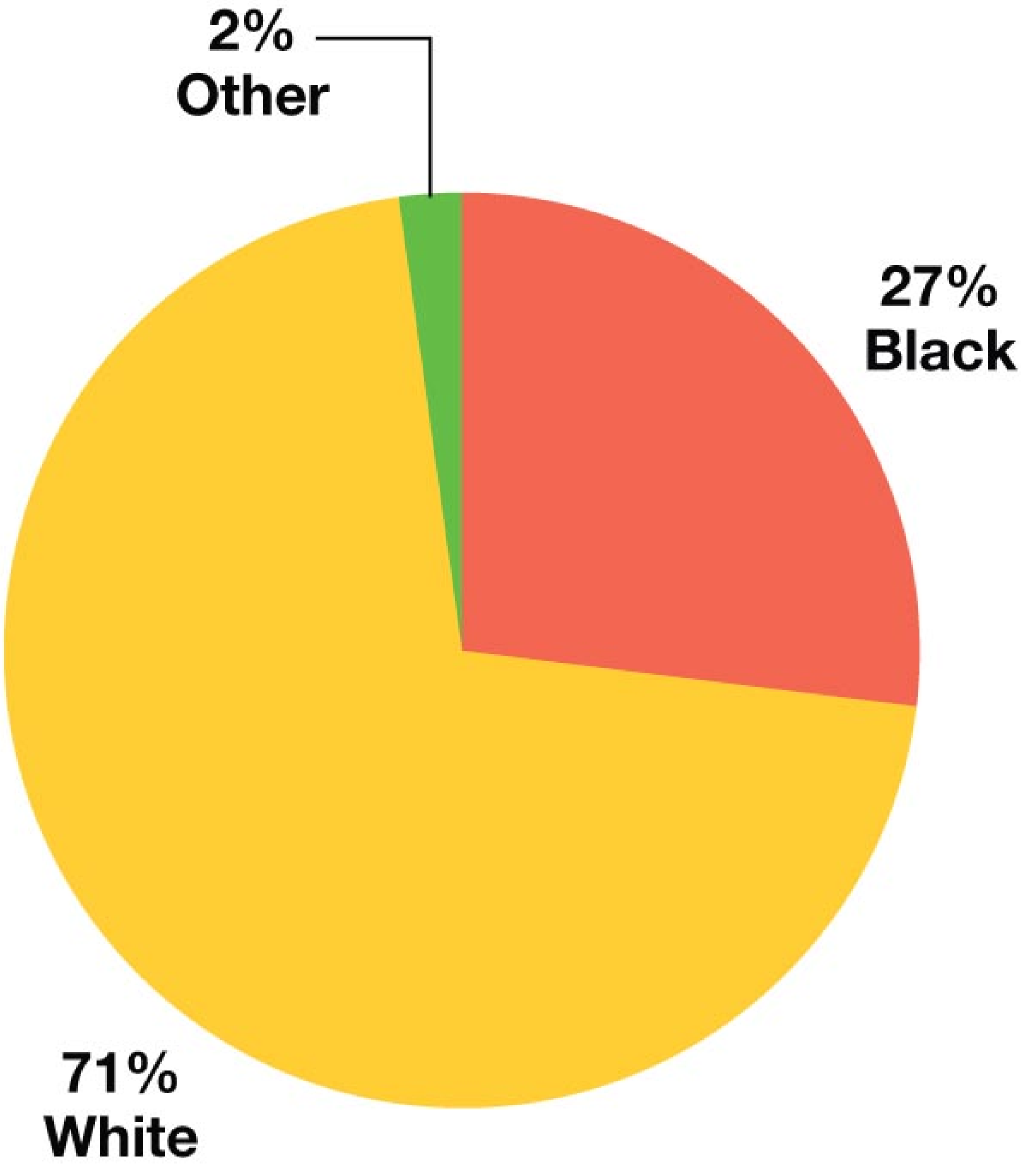
This is but one example of the pervasive, often less visible types of discrimination that members of marginalized groups confront. The legal system is rife with examples of white-collar crime, which tends to be committed by members of the dominant groups in society, being punished much less severely than crimes committed by members of marginalized groups. The substantially different penalties for possession of crack versus powder cocaine mentioned earlier are but one example. Consider also the statistics presented in **Figure 11.5**. Although White Americans outnumber Black Americans by a wide margin both in the general population and in the ranks of current or recent drug users, as many Black as White individuals are sent to state prison for their drug offenses, and more Black than White individuals are sent to federal prison (Hinton, Henderson, & Reed, 2018). Again, these are pure demographic statistics, so they need to be interpreted with caution. Nevertheless, the argument that these results may be the result of systemic bias in the legal system is supported by data showing that although Black Americans make up only 13 percent of the population, they represent 47 percent of those exonerated for wrongful convictions (Equal Justice Initiative, n. d.).



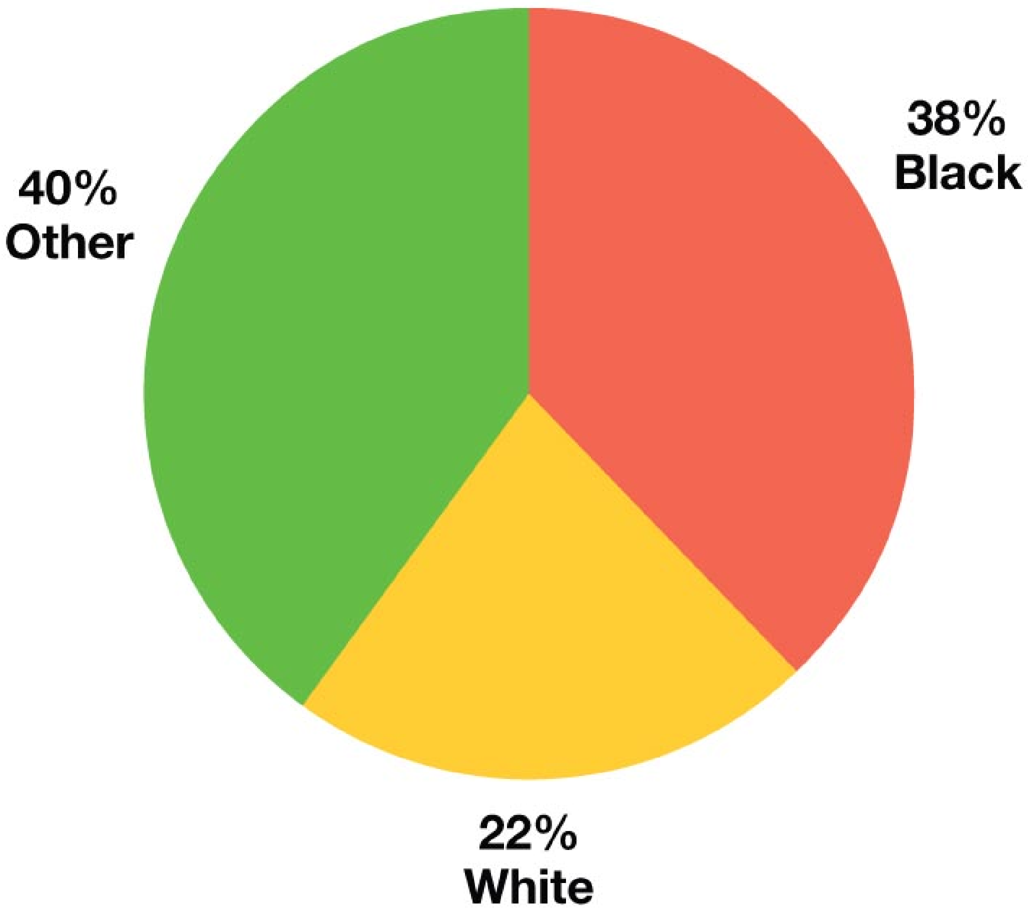
(A) U.S. population



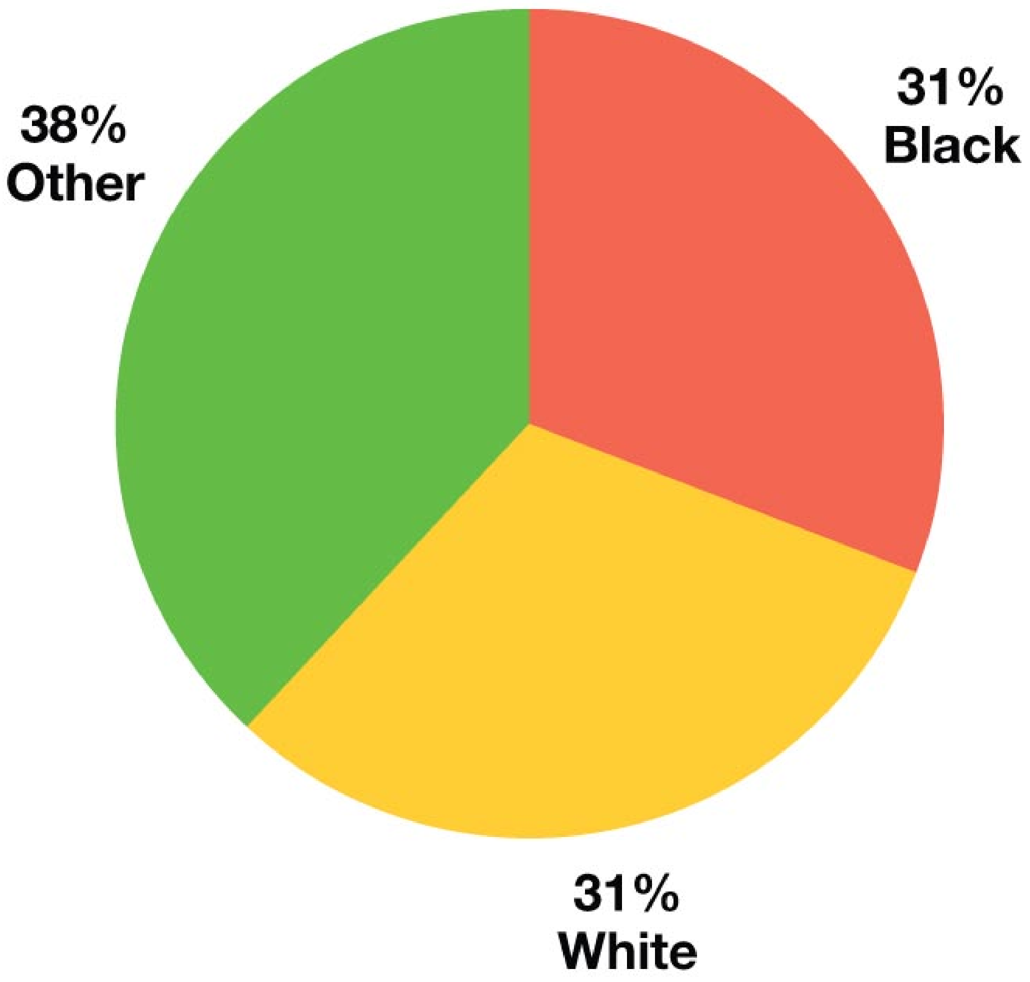
(B) Drug users in past year



(C) Drug offense arrests



(D) State prison sentences for drug offenses



(E) Federal prison sentences for drug offenses

FIGURE 11.5 **DRUG USE AND PENALTIES FOR DRUG USE FOR WHITE AND BLACK AMERICANS** (A) White people outnumber Black people in the general population, (B) in the number of people who use illegal drugs, and (C) in the number of people arrested for drug possession and distribution. Nevertheless, (D) as many Black people as White people are sentenced to state prison for drug offenses, and (E) more Black people than White people are sentenced to federal prison for drug-related crimes. Source: Adapted from Hinton et al., 2018.

Members of dominant groups in society also enjoy systemic financial advantages. To support this point, one need look no further than the fact that the highest tax rates on labor (that is, on time and energy exerted in performing of one’s job) are higher than the tax rates on capital gains (that is, on the money passively earned by having money in the bank or owning stock in companies). These tax rates work disproportionately to the benefit of wealthy people, for whom relatively more of their income is in the form of capital gains. Of course, many wealthy people benefit further by employing accountants and tax lawyers to reduce their already low tax rate even more. Changes in the tax systems in countries around the world are responsible for much of the widening gap between rich and poor, as the ratio of money going to capital versus labor has increased markedly in recent decades (Piketty, 2014).

BOX 11.2

FOCUS ON THE LAW

Stereotypical Facial Features and the Death Penalty

The election of Barack Obama as the 44th president of the United States highlights the often-ambiguous nature of race. Although the child of a White mother and a Black father, Obama is almost always referred to as the first African American president, not the first biracial president. This is no doubt a legacy of the “one-drop rule”: Historically, individuals were considered Black if they had any Black ancestry at all. Various Southern states used this standard to back the notorious Jim Crow laws that enforced racial segregation and restricted the rights of Black

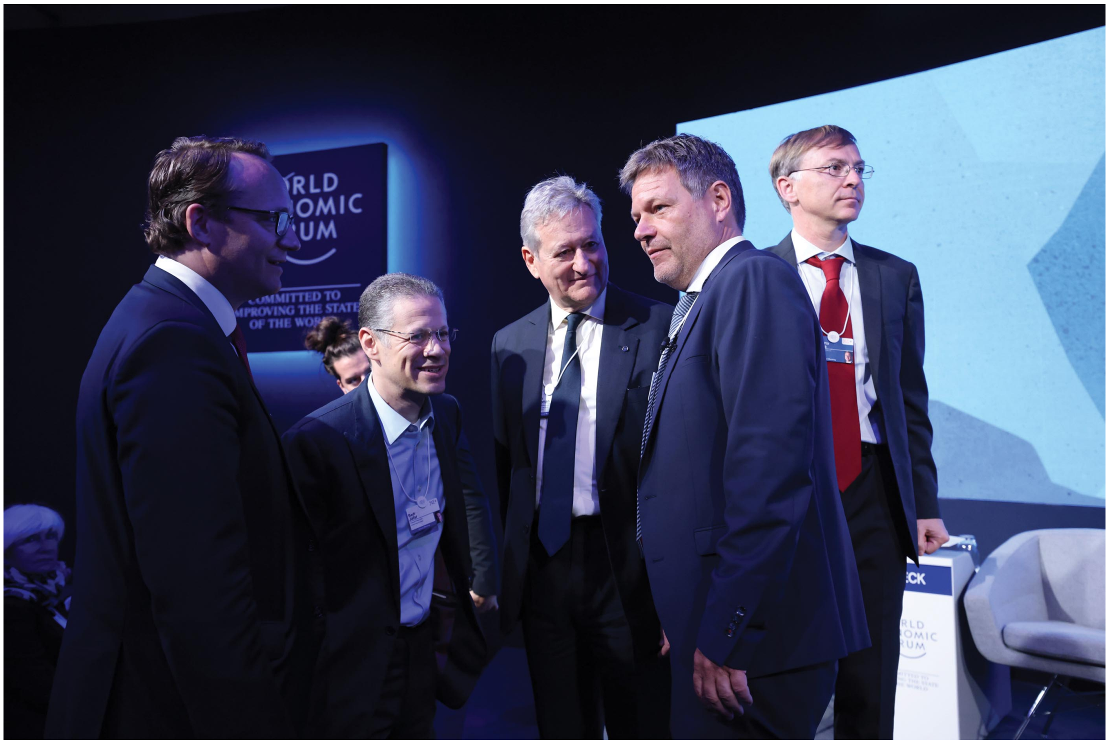
Americans. But now, with society having moved beyond the one-drop rule, we are left with the difficult issue of “who counts” as Black, White, Asian, Hispanic, and so on. Indeed, many biologists question whether racial categories make any sense at all—that is, whether race really exists (Bamshad & Olson, 2003). Genetic analyses enabled by the Human Genome Project have shown that there is as much genetic variation within a population in, say, Asia as there is between that population and one in, say, Europe.

The psychology behind the one-drop rule notwithstanding, race-based judgments about others often differ in intensity depending on the degree to which a person’s physical features conform to a stereotype. Black faces with more stereotypically African features (darker skin, fuller lips, more flared nostrils) elicit prejudiced reactions more readily than faces with less stereotypical features do (Livingston & Brewer, 2002; Ma & Correll, 2011). Furthermore, both Black and White individuals with more stereotypically African features are assumed to have traits associated with common stereotypes of Black Americans (I. V. Blair et al., 2002). In the most consequential manifestation of this tendency, both Black and White convicts with stereotypically African features tend to receive harsher sentences than those with less stereotypically African features do (I. V. Blair, Judd, & Chapleau, 2004), and Black people accused of capital crimes are more likely to end up on death row if they have stereotypically African features (Eberhardt et al., 2006). Moreover, testifying to the utility of the motivational perspective on stereotyping and prejudice discussed in Chapter 10, people are more likely to categorize ambiguous faces as Black when they are primed with thoughts of economic scarcity (Krosch & Amodio, 2014; Rodeheffer, Hill, & Lord, 2012).

The list of institutional disadvantages faced by members of marginalized groups could go on and on. For instance, people in predominately non-White communities in the United States have to wait in line to vote nearly a third longer than people in predominately White communities do, and they are 74 percent more likely to have to wait for more than half an hour (M. K. Chen et al., 2019).

But this is a psychology textbook, not a sociological or legal text, so let’s consider a more fundamentally social psychological example of advantage (to men) and disadvantage (to women) in mass media. An analysis of photographs of men and women in U.S. magazines and newspapers revealed that the person’s face was more prominent in the photographs of men (that is, the face took up more of the overall photograph) than in the photographs of women (which tended to include more of the women’s bodies). The same was true in publications from 11 countries around the world, in the artwork produced in over six centuries of art history, and in college students’ drawings of men and women (D. Archer et al., 1983; Nigro et al., 1988). This difference works to men’s advantage: People are seen as more competent when their faces are more prominent in photographs (Schwarz & Kurz, 1989).

INSTITUTIONAL DISCRIMINATION IN TERMS OF WHAT’S ABSENT Just as members of marginalized groups can feel the sting of inattention from other individuals, so too can they suffer from a more pervasive inattention and underrepresentation in society at large. The idea is embedded in the very term *underrepresented group*, which connotes an absence. There would be no need for such a term if members of marginalized groups were represented in boardrooms, Hollywood studios, and academic faculties in proportion to their demographic numbers. In reality, most marginalized groups in the United States are underrepresented in the ranks of CEOs and NFL coaches and in the clinical trials that determine recommended medical treatments. And their voices are also underrepresented in the academic journals that report the research we have drawn on in writing this book (S. O. Roberts et al., 2020).


WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM
COMMITTED TO IMPROVING THE STATE OF THE WORLD

INSTITUTIONAL DISCRIMINATION Women and people of color are often underrepresented in meetings of the rich and powerful, as in this 2022 meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

This sort of underrepresentation is even more pronounced in most other parts of the world. Consider this (admittedly extreme) example: The Golden Globes have been around since 1943, handing out awards for the best that film and television have to offer as determined by the 87 members of the Hollywood Foreign Press Association. The Golden Globe Awards ceremony was a major event in the film industry’s awards season until it lost its television sponsor in 2022—after it became known that not a single member of its voting body was a person of color. Talk about underrepresentation.

This kind of absence, which can lead to disidentification with society and its institutions more broadly, is particularly pronounced for Indigenous people in the United States (Fryburg & Eason, 2017). An analysis of prime-time television shows from 1987 to 2008 found only three characters (among more than two thousand) who were Native American (Tukachinsky, Mastro, & Yarchi, 2015). Things aren’t much better outside the world of entertainment: A majority of the annual proclamations made by the president of the United States to commemorate Thanksgiving Day have failed to make any mention of Indigenous people, even though a meal shared by the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag people is such a big part of the holiday’s origin story (Kurtiş, Adams, & Yellow Bird, 2010).

And don’t forget the 1979 Church Rock uranium spill. Actually, you probably can’t forget it because you’ve probably never heard of it. Four months before the widely covered Three Mile Island nuclear accident, the largest release of radioactive material in U.S. history took place in Church Rock, New Mexico, contaminating the groundwater and an essential river used by the Navajo Nation. But in part because the damage was done to the Navajo Nation and did not, like the Three Mile Island accident, threaten residents of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania’s capital, it did not attract much press attention and is largely absent from the history books. Some difference in press coverage is to be expected because Three Mile Island is located in a more populous area. But the extent to which the Church Rock uranium spill was underreported is striking.

Being largely absent from the broader culture has psychological consequences. Native American students who are exposed to Native American role models report feeling that they belong more in school than do Native American students who aren’t exposed to such role models. In contrast, European American students who are similarly exposed to role models of European heritage do not experience a comparable boost in feelings of belonging, presumably because European American role models are already so present in their schools (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). Over time, the chronic omission of Native American role models in education can lead Native American students to disidentify with school altogether, perpetuating educational disparities between Native and European American students.

As we noted earlier, the cultural invisibility that is a big part of the Native American experience is also a frequent fact of life for people with intersectional identities. Note that a multiracial category was only added to the U.S. Census in 2000, meaning that, before then, a half-Black, half-Asian woman would have had to choose one race or the other. Her intersectionality was simply not recognized—demographically invisible, in other words. Recall from earlier in the chapter that Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) have posited that intersectional individuals tend to be relatively invisible because they aren’ t prototypical members of any of their constituent identity groups. The authors called attention to this source of invisibility through what they referred to as the librarian’ s dilemma: Imagine that you are a librarian, and your library receives a book on Black women’ s history. Where do you put it: in the Women’ s History section or the Black History section? You have to choose one or the other, and your choice makes part of the book’ s contents hard for patrons to access—invisible, in other words.

Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach discussed how people with intersectional identities are treated as marginal members of marginal groups and thus tend to be relatively invisible in historical narratives (histories of slavery feature men more than women), in political discourse and advocacy (Black women’ s concerns can get lost in both women’ s movements and racial justice movements), and in the eyes of the law (plaintiffs who bring intersectional claims of discrimination don’ t fare as well in the courts as do those who claim a single form of discrimination; Best et al., 2011).

Of course, there are times when invisibility can be a blessing rather than a curse, and, accordingly, there are times in which intersectional individuals benefit from not being a prototypical member of either of their identity groups. For example, because Black women are not seen as prototypical of either the category of women or of Black people, there can be less resistance to their acting in ways that depart from the stereotypes of those groups. Black women can display more dominance than White women or Black men without paying a price in terms of how likable or hirable they seem to others. In one study, participants were shown a photo of a White or Black man or woman and told that he or she was a senior vice president of a Fortune 500 company (Livingston, Rosette, & Washington, 2012). Participants were further told about a meeting between the vice president and an employee who had performed below expectations. Half were told that the vice president displayed dominance in the meeting, saying such things as “I demand that you take steps to improve your performance.” The other half were told that the vice president struck a more communal tone, saying such things as “I encourage you to take steps to improve your performance.” Participants then rated how well they thought the vice president handled the situation and how effective the vice president was as a leader. The White male vice president was rated highly whether he was dominant or communal, whereas the White female vice president was seen as significantly less effective as a leader when she acted in a dominant manner. Notably, however, the Black female vice president did not pay the same price in perceived effectiveness when she acted assertively (see **Figure 11.6**).

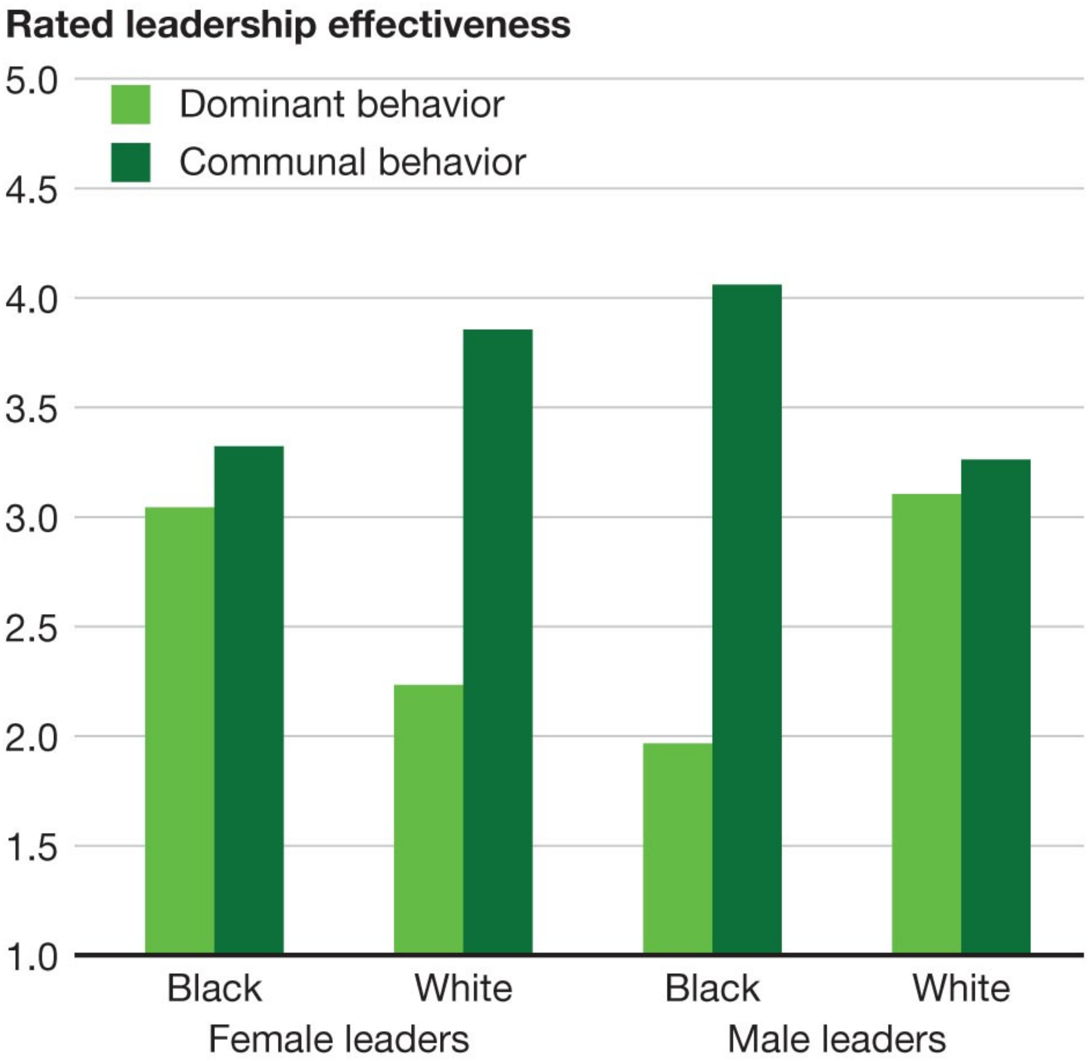


FIGURE 11.6 **RATINGS OF LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS** Participants rated the leadership qualities of Black and White male and female leaders who had acted in a dominant or communal manner. The White male leader scored highly on leadership whether he acted in a dominant or communal manner, as was the case for the Black female leader. Both the White female and Black male leader, in contrast, were seen as less effective leaders when they acted in a dominant fashion. Source: Adapted from Livingston et al., 2012.

LANGUAGE AS A DETERMINANT OF WHAT'S PRESENT OR ABSENT When you think of politicians, CEOs, or film directors, who comes to mind? You shouldn’t fault yourself too much for being sexist if you mostly thought of men. After all, 75 percent of members of parliaments around the world are men (UN Women, 2021), as are 94 percent of CEOs of S&P companies and 93 percent of the directors of the 250 top grossing films (Catalyst, 2022; Hunt et al., 2017). The instances that spring to mind most readily are often those we’ve been exposed to most often. That can make gender inequality self-fulfilling, as boys may have an easier time seeing themselves in those roles and therefore may be more inclined to take the steps necessary to achieve them. This increases the chance that such gender imbalances will be perpetuated in the future.

But as we saw in Chapter 4, other things beyond real-world frequency determine which instances of different categories spring to mind. One such determinant is language. Many languages are androcentric, often using masculine terms (such as “mankind” or even “humanity”) to refer to everyone. The use of such generic masculine language, as opposed to the use of gender-inclusive terms, makes it more likely that people will think of a man as representing the category in question (Bigler & Leaper, 2015). The language we use, in other words, has consequences: It makes it more likely that some things will be present and other things absent in our minds, which can have the effect of empowering some groups and disadvantaging others.

A recent study of language’s impact in influencing who comes to mind and who doesn’t took advantage of the fact that, in 2016, Yale University changed the title of an academic/residential leadership role from *master* to *head* (Bailey, Dovidio, & LaFrance, 2022). The investigators noted that *master* can be considered a generic masculine term (it has a feminine counterpart of *mistress*), whereas *head* cannot (it has no feminine counterpart). Did the name change influence how the students thought about the individuals in that leadership role? It did indeed. When students in 2015 were asked to think of a typical master and to assign the person they imagined a name, 77 percent thought of a man; in 2018, when asked the same questions about a typical head, only 56 percent thought of a man. The students in both cohorts were also shown photos of different Yale faculty members, one at a time, and asked to indicate whether each was a master or not (the 2015 wave of student participants) or a head or not (the 2018 participants). Half of the photos were of faculty who were in those leadership roles, and half were not. The 2015 students more accurately identified which men were house masters than which women were, but the 2018 students were equally accurate at identifying which men and women were house heads. Language matters: It influences what (and whom) we attend to and think about.

The Inner Life of Members of Stereotyped Groups

There are some stereotypes that you don’t know about. (Did you know that there’s a stereotype that Mormons love trampolines?) But many of them, accurate and inaccurate ones alike, are widely shared. And that opens up another way in which they influence social life. If I am a member of a marginalized group, knowing that you have a stereotype about people like me is likely to grab my attention, occupy my mind, and possibly influence my behavior. And my awareness that you’re likely to think that people like me tend to hold stereotypes about people like you is also likely to influence my behavior—if nothing else, by making me try to convince you that I’m not one of those people who believes in such stereotypes.

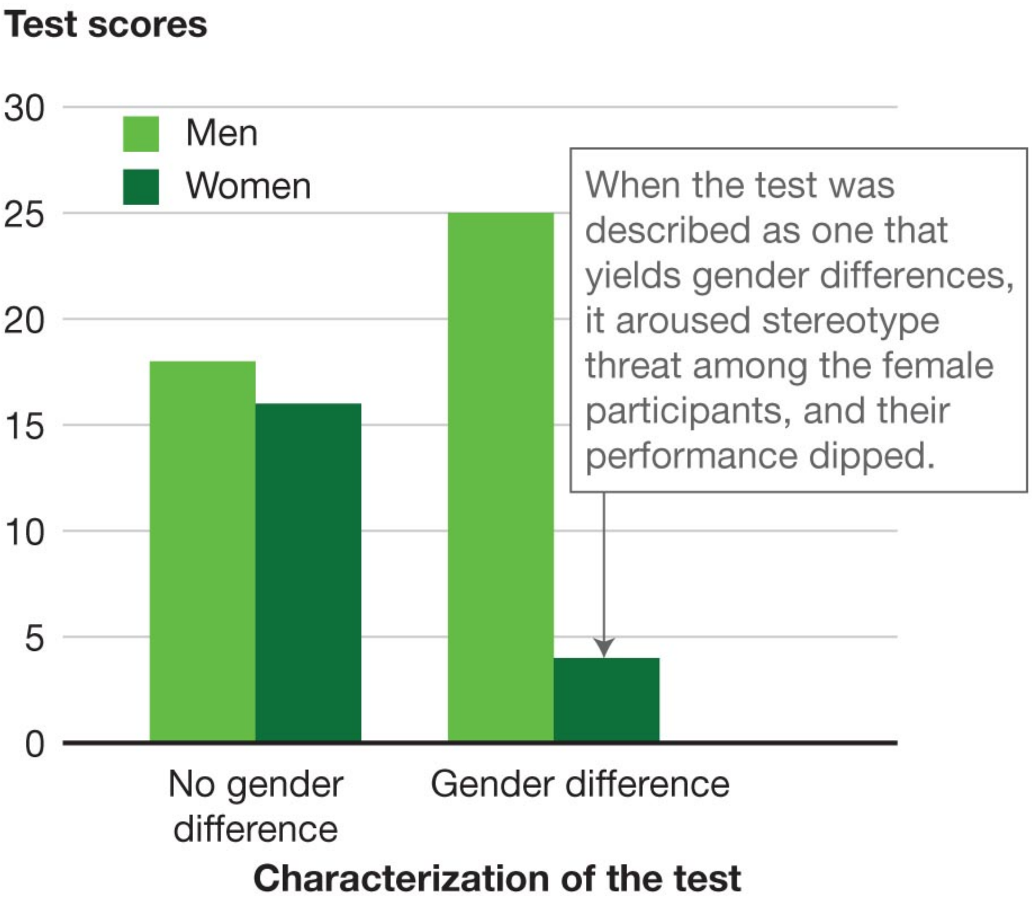
All of this knowledge about stereotypes (their content) and meta-knowledge of stereotypes (who holds them) affects our inner lives in various ways. Let’s consider a few of the most important.

ATTRIBUTIONAL AMBIGUITY

To function effectively, people need of events happening around them (see Chapter 4). But this understanding is not so straightforward for members of marginalized groups because they can’t always tell whether their experiences have the same causes as the experiences of majority-group members do or whether their experiences are instead the result of prejudice. In other words, they suffer from *attributional ambiguity*: “Did my officemate get the promotion instead of me because I’m a woman?” “Would the state trooper have pulled me over if I were White?” Questions like these can be distressing even when it comes to positive outcomes: “Did I get that fellowship because I’m a Latino?” When someone has to wonder whether an accomplishment is the product of an affirmative action policy, for example, it can be difficult to completely “own” it and reap the full measure of pride that the achievement would ordinarily inspire.

In one study that examined this type of attributional predicament, Black and White students received flattering or unflattering feedback from a White student in an adjacent room (Crocker et al., 1991). Half the participants were led to assume that the White student could see them through a one-way mirror, and half thought they couldn’t be seen because a blind covered the mirror. Whether or not they could be seen had no effect on how White students reacted to the feedback, but it did affect how Black students reacted. When Black students thought the other person could *not* see them—and therefore didn’t know their race—their self-esteem went down from the unflattering feedback and was boosted by the positive feedback. When they thought the other person *could* see them, in contrast, their self-esteem was not injured by the negative feedback (presumably because they did not know whether to attribute this feedback to their own failings or to the other’s prejudice), nor was it enhanced by the flattery (presumably because they did not know whether to attribute the positive feedback to their own skill or to the other’s condescension). This study indicates that members of marginalized or stigmatized groups live in a less certain world, not knowing to what causes they can attribute their experiences.

STEREOTYPE THREAT An extensive program of research initiated by Claude Steele and his colleagues highlights a second difficulty for members of stigmatized groups (Steele, 1997; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). Their performance can be impaired by stereotype threat, the fear that they will confirm the stereotypes others have about them and their group. In one study, researchers examined the effect on women’s math test scores of bringing to mind the stereotype that women don’t perform as well as men in mathematics (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999). In one condition, participants were told there was no gender difference on a particular test they were about to take. Other participants were told that there was a gender difference in favor of men.



When the test was described as one that yields gender differences, it aroused stereotype threat among the female participants, and their performance dipped.

(A)

(B)

FIGURE 11.7**STEREOTYPE THREAT AND PERFORMANCE** This study shows the performance of men and women on a math test when they thought the test tapped gender differences and when they did not.Source: Adapted from Spencer et al., 1999.

As **Figure 11.7** shows, men and women performed equally well when they thought there was no gender difference on the test, but women performed worse than men when they thought there was a gender difference.

It’s not necessary to blatantly invoke stereotype threat for it to have an effect—although, not surprisingly, the effect tends to be greater when the threat is more obvious (Liu et al., 2021; Shewach, Sackett, & Quint, 2019). Michael Inzlicht and Talia Ben-Zeev (2000) had undergraduate women take a math test in the company of either two other women or two men, but the researchers did not say a word about any gender differences on the test. Nonetheless, those who took the test with other women got an average of 70 percent of the problems correct. Those who took the test alongside men got 55 percent correct on average.

In another study, Steele and Joshua Aronson examined Black students’ sensitivity to stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Playing on a stereotype that questions Black people’s intellectual ability, they gave Black and White college students a difficult verbal test taken from the Graduate Record Exam. Half the students were led to believe that the test could measure their intellectual ability, and half were told that the investigators were in the early stages of developing the test and that nothing could be learned about intellectual ability from the participants’ scores. This information had no effect on the performance of White students. In contrast, the Black students did as well as the White students when they thought it was the test that was being tested, but they performed much worse than the White students when they thought their intellectual ability was being tested. Again, a blatant manipulation was not required to produce a significant effect on the performance of the Black students: Even without directly priming any stereotypes about Black Americans’ intellectual performance, the students still felt the effects of that pervasive stereotype, and it affected their scores accordingly. In a follow-up study, it was enough simply to have participants indicate their race at the top of the page to cause Black students’ performance to be worse than in a control condition in which they did not indicate their race (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

It seems that no one is safe from stereotype threat. Another research team showed that the math performance of White men deteriorated when they were reminded of Asian Americans’ proficiency in math (J. M. Aronson et al., 1999). And in a particularly clever experiment, Jeff Stone and his colleagues had college students perform a laboratory golf task described as a measure of “natural athletic ability,” “sports intelligence,” or “sports psychology” (Stone et al., 1999). White and Black students performed equally well in the “sports psychology” condition. But Black students performed significantly worse when it was described as a test of “sports intelligence,” and White students performed worse when it was described as a test of “natural athletic ability.” In still another telling study, Asian American women did worse on a math test than control participants did when their gender was made salient, but they performed better than control participants did when their race was highlighted (Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999).

Stereotype threat appears to undermine performance in a number of ways. It leads to increased arousal, which can directly interfere with performance on complex tasks (see Chapter 12; Ben-Zeev, Fein, & Inzlicht, 2005) and serve as a source of distraction that interferes with concentration on the task at hand (Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000). Furthermore, knowing that one’s group is “suspect” in the eyes of others can both directly undermine performance and lead individuals to “play it safe” by being more obsessed with avoiding failure than striving for success (Cadinu et al., 2005; Seibt & Förster, 2004). In accordance with the idea that stereotypes affect health, stereotype threats to women’s math performance have been shown to increase physiological markers of stress (John-Henderson, Rheinschmidt, & Mendoza-Denton, 2015).

Although all people are vulnerable to some type of stereotype threat based on their group memberships, Steele (1997) maintains that the vulnerability of Black Americans has particular potential for damage. Stereotype threat can result in poorer overall academic performance, which undermines confidence, rendering the individual still more susceptible to stereotype threat. This vicious cycle can result in disidentification from academic pursuits, as students who feel the threat most acutely often opt out of academics altogether and identify other ways to invest their talent and energy and build their self-esteem. The same process appears to play a role in the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) (Deemer, Lin, & Soto, 2015; Walton et al., 2015). Fortunately, social psychologists have developed a number of low-cost, highly effective interventions that can help people deal with the debilitating effects of stereotype threat in schools (see Application Module 3).

THE COST OF CONCEALMENT Australia is known for its powerhouse Olympic swimming teams, but no Aussie swimmer has had a bigger hold on the country’s imagination than Ian Thorpe. Nicknamed “the Thorpedo” for the speed and grace with which he cut through the water, Thorpe won five Olympic gold medals in his career. Throughout his career, Thorpe was dogged by rumors that he was gay, which he steadfastly denied. “You know, I’m a little bit different to what most people would consider being an Australian male,” he said. “That doesn’t make me gay. I mean I’m straight, so people want to claim me as part of a minority group and put labels on you and that’s not what I’m about, and I don’t understand why people are like that” (Magnay, 2002). After retiring from swimming, however, Thorpe announced during a television interview that he was in fact gay.

6

IAN THORPE Ian Thorpe celebrating his record-setting gold medal in the 400-meter freestyle at the Sydney International Aquatic Center in Sydney, Australia, during the 2000 Summer Olympic Games.

Sadly, Thorpe’s experience is not unusual. Members of stigmatized groups throughout history have often felt compelled to hide their true identity. LGBTQ individuals have often chosen to remain “in the closet,” light-skinned Black people have sometimes tried to “pass” as White, and many older adults get plastic surgery, tummy tucks, and toupees in an effort to hide their true age. The ubiquity of such underground experiences makes one wonder what sort of toll they exact.

A big one, it turns out. Physically, the concealment of sexual orientation is associated with cardiovascular stress, and gay men who conceal their sexual orientation show more rapid progression of HIV symptoms (Cole et al., 1996; Pérez-Benítez et al., 2007). Psychologically, being open about one’s sexual orientation is associated with a variety of indicators of better mental health, including reduced depression, less anger, and higher self-esteem (Legate, Ryan, & Weinstein, 2012; Miranda & Storms, 1989; M. W. Ross, 1990; Szymanski, Chung, & Balsam, 2001).

Concealment can also take a cognitive toll. In one study, researchers Clayton Critcher and Melissa Ferguson (2013) instructed half of their participants, all straight, to conceal their sexual orientation during a mock interview, whereas the control participants were free to say whatever they wanted. The investigators predicted that the act of concealment would be mentally taxing, making participants in the first group less able to perform well on subsequent tasks. Indeed, across several experiments, they found that those who were asked to conceal their sexual orientation did less well on tests of spatial ability, self-control, and physical stamina. The monitoring necessary to conceal a part of oneself is demanding, and meeting those demands can have unfortunate consequences down the road.

Other research has shown that concealing any of a variety of significant identities (e.g., being a religious person attending a secular college) leads to the development of something of a “divided self,” whereby aspects of oneself that are public are mentally organized separately from aspects that are private. This public/private schematization is associated with depressive symptoms (Sedlovskaya et al., 2013).

LOOKING BACK

Members of underrepresented and stigmatized groups face discrimination from other individuals, often receiving harsher treatment from members of law enforcement, classroom instructors, and company recruiters and interviewers. They also face institutional discrimination: They often have a harder time landing housing in desirable neighborhoods, receive harsher penalties for similar crimes, are disfavored by the tax code, and have to wait longer to vote. Discrimination against members of marginalized groups can involve acts of commission (for example, harsh treatment by law enforcement) or omission (for example, being overlooked in social interactions or underrepresented in the media). Victims of stereotyping can suffer attributional ambiguity—that is, not knowing whether others’ feedback on their performance is genuine or based on their group membership. They can suffer from stereotype threat, performing worse than they would otherwise because they are afraid of confirming a stereotype that exists about their group. Members of some marginalized groups feel compelled to try to cover up their status, an effort that can exact a physical and psychological toll.

Glossary

systemic inequities	Historical or contemporary laws, policies, practices, and norms that advantage some groups in society and disadvantage others (e.g., genders, racial, or ethnic groups) when it comes to such things as wealth, education, housing, and health care.
stereotype threat	The fear of confirming the stereotypes that others have about one's group.

The Effects of Stereotypes and Prejudice on Social Interaction

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LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- Describe some of the most common difficulties people confront when interacting with members of different racial, ethnic, and religious groups.

Interacting with people who are different from us can be unusually rewarding. They can provide us with fresh perspectives and insights. As Antoine de Saint-Exupéry put it, “He who is different from me does not impoverish me—he enriches me.” As we noted in Chapter 9, encounters with others unlike ourselves can lead to a sense of self-expansion, which people find inherently gratifying (Aron, Aron, & Norman, 2004; Page-Gould & Mendoza-Denton, 2011). Successful or pleasant interactions with people from other demographic groups can also make us feel socially connected, not just to those like ourselves but to humanity in general.

But interacting and having conversations with people who are different from us can also be stressful. When we’re told “don’t talk about money, politics, or religion,” the concern is that trouble will arise from *differences* in wealth, political conviction, or religious belief. People who are exactly aligned on these dimensions rarely run into conversational trouble.

Indeed, interactions between members of different ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups can be challenging for several reasons. For one thing, the tendency for people to associate disproportionately with people like themselves means that interactions with people from other groups don't happen as often as within-group interactions do. Their relative rarity, furthermore, can be self-reinforcing. Nicole Shelton and Jennifer Richeson (2005) have shown how White people fear that Black people don't really want to interact with them, and Black people think the same about Whites, which leads both to hold back and avoid interaction altogether or to act in a stiff, guarded manner that reinforces their original doubts about one another.

(A)

RESPECT
TRUMP
HOMOPHOBIA
RACISM
CORRUPTION

(B)

CROSS-GROUP INTERACTION Interactions across (A) political and (B) religious divides can be tense, as both sides worry about how the interaction will unfold, what the other person will think or do, and how they themselves will be evaluated by those on the “other side.”

A second reason that cross-group interactions can be challenging is that, as when talking about money, politics, or religion, there is often a concern about “stepping in it,” or “stepping on a land mine.” That is, people are often aware of historical or contemporary tensions between their own group and other groups and may fear that those tensions will play out in the here and now of their own interactions. In one study, for example, White participants who were concerned about coming across as prejudiced experienced increases in cortisol, a stress-related hormone, during an interracial interaction (Trawalter et al., 2012). In other studies, when the cardiovascular activity of White participants was monitored during an interaction with a White confederate who belonged to no obvious marginalized group, participants responded physiologically in a manner consistent with their treating the interaction as a challenge—a response that’s physiologically benign. But when interacting with either a Black confederate, someone thought to be socioeconomically disadvantaged, or someone with a prominent facial birthmark, the participants’ cardiovascular profile was more reflective of the experience of threat, a more toxic physiological reaction (Blascovich et al., 2001; Mendes et al., 2002).

In addition to a general fear that things won’t go well in interactions with people from other racial, ethnic, religious, or socioeconomic groups, people experience more specific fears tied to their knowledge about what others might think about the groups to which they belong. Because of the history of slavery in the United States—and the more than 150 years of mistreatment of Black Americans afterward—White Americans are often concerned about not coming across as racist when interacting with Black people (C. S. Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). And, as one would expect from the stereotype content model discussed earlier in this chapter, this often plays out as White people being concerned with being liked. As the dominant social group in the United States, they assume that others don’t doubt their competence, but they know that their warmth, kindness, and morality may be in question. Members of marginalized groups, however, worry that others may question their competence, so they enter intergroup interactions wanting to be respected. These divergent concerns have been documented both in the explicit interaction goals expressed by White and non-White participants and in their actions during cross-race exchanges (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010).

An intriguing side effect of the concern with being liked can be seen in White liberals’ behavior during interracial interactions. They shy away from using expressions of competence in their language—or, as the investigators put it, they “downshift” their language—when interacting with people of color, inadvertently acting in something of a patronizing manner (Dupree & Fiske, 2019). For example, when asked to select adjectives to describe themselves to someone with a White-sounding name, liberal Whites chose words like *assertive* and *competitive* that connote competence. But when describing themselves to someone with a Black-sounding name, they chose words like *supportive* and *compassionate* that connote warmth. More conservative White participants did just the opposite. An examination of speeches delivered by Democratic and Republican candidates for president since 1992 uncovered a similar pattern: The more liberal Democratic candidates, but not their Republican rivals, used less competence-related language when speaking to audiences consisting largely of people of color than they did when speaking to largely White audiences.

A series of follow-up studies revealed a complementary competence upshift on the part of Black and Hispanic conservatives (Dupree, 2021). For example, in their speeches to Congress, which remains a mostly White body, conservative Black and Hispanic politicians emphasize competence more than their more liberal Black and Hispanic peers do. In another study, Black participants were asked to create an online profile of themselves, ostensibly to present to another participant. An analysis of the content of their profiles revealed that conservative Black respondents who thought they were interacting with a White person emphasized high status more than their liberal peers did. Tellingly, conservative and liberal Black respondents did not differ in their self-presentations when they thought they were interacting with a Black person.

Interacting with members of other groups is not always stressful, of course. We often get swept up in a joint task that needs completing, a drama unfolding in film or on television, or the details of compelling conversation and lose any sense of self-consciousness. But unpleasantness and self-consciousness lurk in other contexts and on other topics. Sometimes the tension results from anticipating disagreement—

for example, if Donald Trump and Joe Biden voters were to discuss the 2020 election or if CNN and Fox News viewers were to talk about COVID-19 vaccinations. But other times, tension arises from the fear that we'll say the wrong thing or that what we say will be misconstrued—as, for example, when cisgender and trans people discuss public bathrooms or when Arab and Jewish Americans discuss the Middle East.

In one study that highlights the contextual nature of anxieties about intergroup interactions, White participants who thought they were about to interact with either two White or two Black fellow participants were asked to arrange three chairs for the conversation.

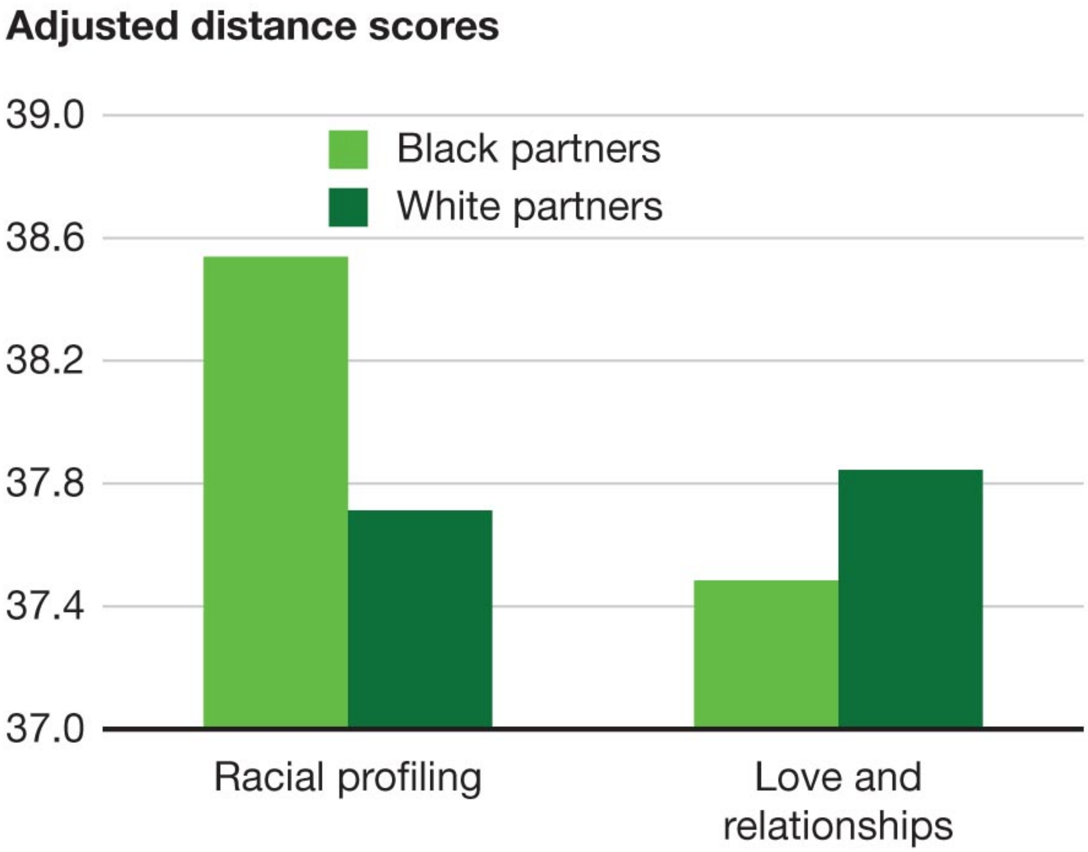

FIGURE 11.8 **TALKING ABOUT RACE** How far away White participants arranged the chairs for a three-person discussion when the other two participants were White versus Black and when the topic to be discussed was racial profiling versus love and relationships. When the

participants thought the topic might be racially sensitive and therefore might produce anxiety, they arranged the chairs farther away for the discussion with Black discussants than they did for the discussion with White discussants—a pattern that was not observed when the topic was not racially sensitive. Source: Adapted from Goff et al., 2008.

They did so such that they would be farther away from their Black conversation partners when they thought they would be discussing racial profiling than when they thought they’d be discussing love and relationships. The anticipated topic of conversation had no impact on the distance they placed between the chairs when they thought they were going to interact with White partners (Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008; **Figure 11.8**).

Michael Norton and colleagues conducted an especially illuminating investigation of the anxieties that can attend interracial interactions. The researchers had White participants play a game similar to the children’s game *Guess Who* with either a Black or White confederate (Norton et al., 2006). Each participant’s task was to ask the confederate a series of yes-or-no questions about a set of photographs and to identify, with as few questions as possible, which target photo the confederate was looking at. Half the photos were of men and half were of women; half were presented with a red background and half with a blue background; and half were of Black individuals and half were of White people. You might be able to anticipate the result of this study by consulting your own anxiety and carefulness in some interracial interactions: The participants were significantly less likely to ask about the race of the target person when they were interacting with a Black confederate (see **Figure 11.9**).

A follow-up study used a variant of this same paradigm but with children as participants. In one version of the game, in which all the target photos were White, the older children, as one would expect, performed better than the younger children did (that is, they needed fewer questions to identify the correct target photo). But when some of the target photos were of Black people, the older children performed worse than their younger counterparts. The older children had apparently picked up on sensitivities surrounding the topic of race, which the younger children were still innocently unaware of (Apfelbaum et al., 2008).

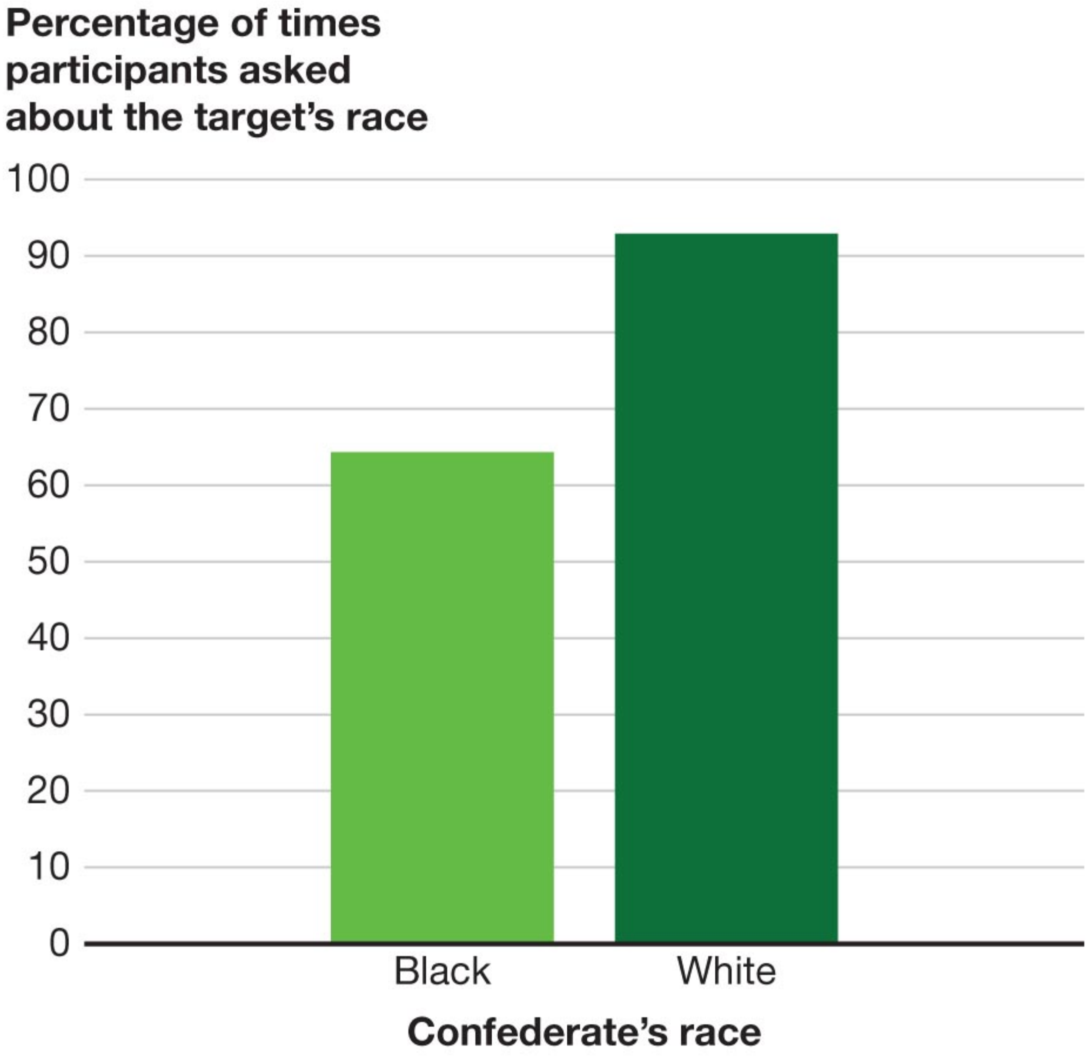

FIGURE 11.9 **ANXIETY ABOUT INTERGROUP INTERACTIONS** In a laboratory variant of the game *Guess Who*, participants had to determine, by asking questions of a confederate, which photo was the target in a set of photographs of people. Half of the photos were of men and half were of women, half

were presented with one background color and half with another background color, and half were Black individuals and half were White. The participants were less inclined to ask about the target person's race (e.g., "Is it one of the Black people?") when the confederate was Black than when the confederate was White. Source: Adapted from Norton et al., 2006.

These studies highlight the difficulties that members of both majority and minority groups can experience in intergroup interactions. Many times, however, such difficulties weigh more heavily on the members of marginalized groups. In one especially telling study of how the biases that play out in intergroup interactions can harm those in marginalized groups, a group of economists examined the performance of cashiers in 34 outlets of a large French grocery chain, some of whom had traditionally French-sounding names and some of whom had names associated with North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa (Glover, Pallais, & Pariente, 2017). The cashiers were quasi-randomly assigned to work on some days for managers who were known to be biased toward Africans, as assessed by their responses to the Implicit Association Test (see Chapters 6 and 10), and on other days for managers who weren't known to be biased. The cashiers with African names outperformed their French-named peers on days when they were working for unbiased managers (which the investigators took to be evidence that the grocery chain set a higher bar for hiring non-European cashiers—only the very best of them were hired, whereas less talented or less hardworking French applicants were given jobs). But when working for the biased managers, the African-named cashiers, but not their French-named counterparts, scanned items more slowly and spent less time at work. The investigators ascribed these differences to the biased managers interacting less with their African-named cashiers, which set in motion a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby the managers' low expectations about these cashiers were reinforced by the cashiers actually exerting less effort.

A final note about biases in intergroup interactions, this one on display in popular media for anyone to see: Max Weisbuch and colleagues examined the interactions between equal-status White and Black characters on 11 popular television shows (Weisbuch, Pauker, & Ambady, 2009). Recordings of these interactions were edited so that one of characters, sometimes a White character and sometimes a Black one, was off screen, and the audio was removed. These edited interactions were then shown to a group of undergraduates who were asked to rate how well the unseen characters were treated by the person (or persons) on screen and how well-liked the unseen character was. Off-screen Black characters were judged to be less well-liked and treated more poorly by the on-screen characters than off-screen White characters were. It’s hard to know what effect a steady television diet of Black characters being subtly depicted in a negative light might have, but it’s hard to imagine that it’s positive.

LOOKING BACK

People sometimes experience tension and awkwardness when interacting with members of outgroups, feelings that show up as physiological markers of stress during such interactions. Adding to the tension is that each group often assumes that those in the other group don’t want to interact with them. Members of a number of marginalized groups, furthermore, often worry about being stereotyped as less competent than majority-group members. Majority-group members often have the complementary worry about seeming cold. This leads politically liberal Whites to “downshift” their use of competence-related language in an effort to be liked, which can come across as patronizing. Black and Hispanic political conservatives often do the opposite, using more competence- and status-related language when interacting with White peers.

The Effects of Stereotypes and Prejudice on Society

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe the connection between racial and ethnic diversity and attitudes toward the social safety net.
- Explain how awareness of the United States becoming a majority-minority country influences political attitudes.
- Explain why it can be hard for even the best-intentioned, most self-aware people to overlook their own privileges.

Living in a prejudiced world, as we’ve discussed above, affects how we think, feel, and act as we go about our lives seeking pleasure, avoiding pain, helping others, trying to leave the places we visit better off than they were when we arrived, and so on. It affects the mental life of people in both dominant and nondominant groups and influences how they interact with one another. It also influences what society is like more broadly—what policies are in place and what society as a whole prioritizes and disfavors. To get a handle on how people’s stereotypes and prejudices affect society as whole, it can be useful to engage in a bit of science fiction and imagine what the world would be like if people weren’t prejudiced and didn’t so easily form inaccurate stereotypes. Try it. What would be different about the world we’re living in? What institutions would be different or wouldn’t exist at all? What might society achieve if it weren’t paying the “tax” that our stereotypes and prejudices impose?

Support for the Social Safety Net

DIVERSE SOCIETIES Societies that are open and diverse have tended to be among the most creative and wealthy in history. Here we see a thriving marketplace in the tourist hot spot of Sydney, Australia.

Historically, increasing the openness and diversity of societies has gone hand in hand with increases in their wealth and productivity (Ashraf & Galor, 2011). Today, in both the United States and in Europe, regions with more foreign-born individuals tend to be more innovative, as measured, for example, by the number of patents filed (Chellaraj, Maskus, & Mattoo, 2008; Ozgen et al., 2014). At the company level, greater diversity, especially when it exists at both the top and bottom of the company hierarchy, is associated with greater productivity (Richard, Triana, & Li, 2021). Openness to working alongside people representing the full range of human diversity helps societies “expand the pie” and makes them more creative and wealthier.

Greater diversity has a very different effect, however, on how the pie is split. Given what social psychologists have learned about the powerful effects of ingroup/outgroup psychology, it would scarcely be surprising to learn that people tend to be open to providing more generous public assistance to people in need if they believe that most of these people are from their own ethnic, racial, and religious groups. And that is clearly the case, both across the United States and internationally. In the United States, states with larger Black populations provide less generous social benefits (Hahn et al., 2017). By way of illustration, Oregon, with a Black population of only 2.9 percent, provides families eligible for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program a monthly stipend three times as high as Mississippi offers, with a population that is 38 percent Black.

Internationally, greater ethnic diversity is associated with diminished social trust—that is, how much citizens trust people in general and their neighbors in particular (Dinesen, Schaeffer, & Sønderskov, 2020). We see across Europe that support for safety net provisions decreases as a function of both the share of immigrants in a country’s population and the diversity of the immigrant population (Alesina, Harnoss, & Rapoport, 2021).

Reactions to Changing Demographics

In a world without strong ingroup commitments, a great many demographic changes wouldn’t even be noticed, let alone resisted. If human beings saw themselves and others as members of one big family, the ethnic, racial, and religious composition of asylum seekers, new immigrants, and the population as a whole wouldn’t matter and might not even register.

But we don’t live in such a world. As we write this, countries such as Hungary and Poland, which erected physical barriers to prevent the entry of refugees from Syria, are warmly welcoming those fleeing Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Indeed, the current right-wing nationalist governments of Poland and Hungary rose to power in part by channeling voters’ fear of newcomers who look different and practice a different religion than the native population. In the United States, former president Donald Trump, whose promise to “build a wall” between the United States and Mexico buoyed his own election, complained loudly that the United States shouldn’t have to accept asylum seekers from “$%%#! countries” like Haiti, El Salvador, and many from Africa. He maintained instead that the United States should take in more immigrants from Norway.

Researchers have examined the impact of the perceived threat of outgroup immigration in a series of experimental studies in which White survey respondents were informed that the United States is projected to become a majority-minority country in 2042—that is, that non-Hispanic Whites will no longer be a majority of the general population by that date but merely one ethnic group, albeit the largest, among many.

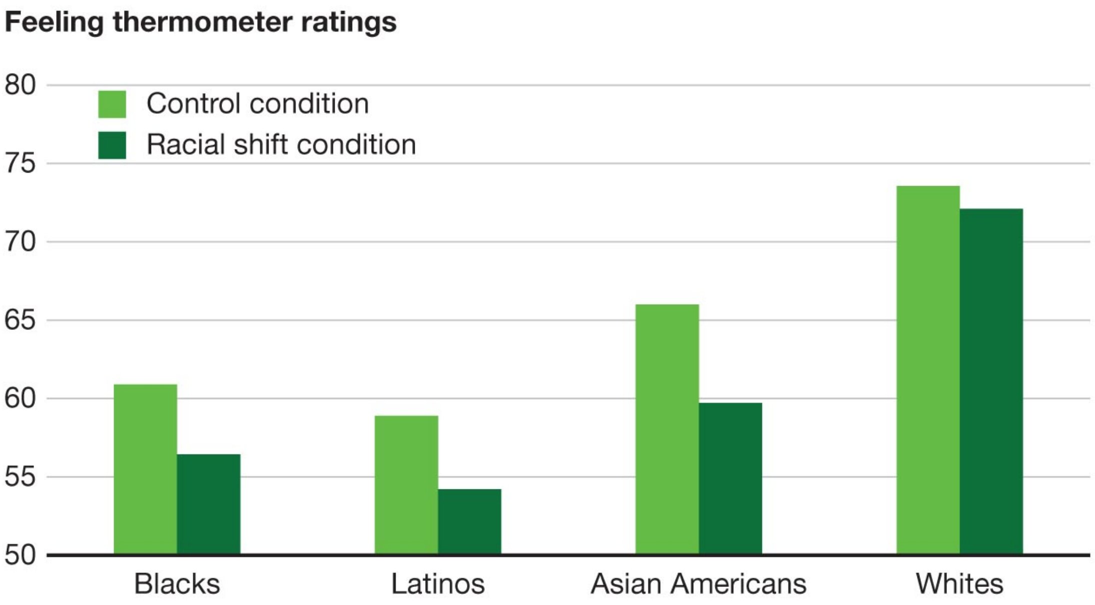

FIGURE 11.10 **FEELINGS OF WARMTH TOWARD MEMBERS OF DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS** Being told that the United States was becoming a majority-minority country in 2042 led White respondents to express less warmth toward Black, Latino, and Asian Americans but not toward White Americans. Source: Adapted from Craig & Richeson (2014a).

In one such study, participants who learned of this projection scored higher on a racial bias scale than did control participants who were merely told about the current demographic makeup of the United States. They placed greater emphasis on working with people from their own ethnic group, for example, and indicated that they would be more bothered if their child married someone from a different ethnic group (Craig & Richeson, 2014a). In another study by the same researchers, White participants informed of the projected demographic shift expressed less warm feelings toward the major non-White ethnic groups in the United States (see **Figure 11.10**).

This concern about looming demographic trends has political implications: Survey respondents who were told that California had recently become a majority-minority state were more likely than respondents in the control condition to say that they leaned more Republican than Democrat (Craig & Richeson, 2014b; **Figure 11.11**). (Control respondents were told that the Hispanic population had become roughly equal to the Black population in the nation as a whole.) Similar results have been obtained in Canada: White Canadians who were shown a graph showing that Whites would soon be less than 50 percent of the population expressed more fear and anger toward other racial groups than those shown a graph with Whites still in the majority (Outten et al., 2012).

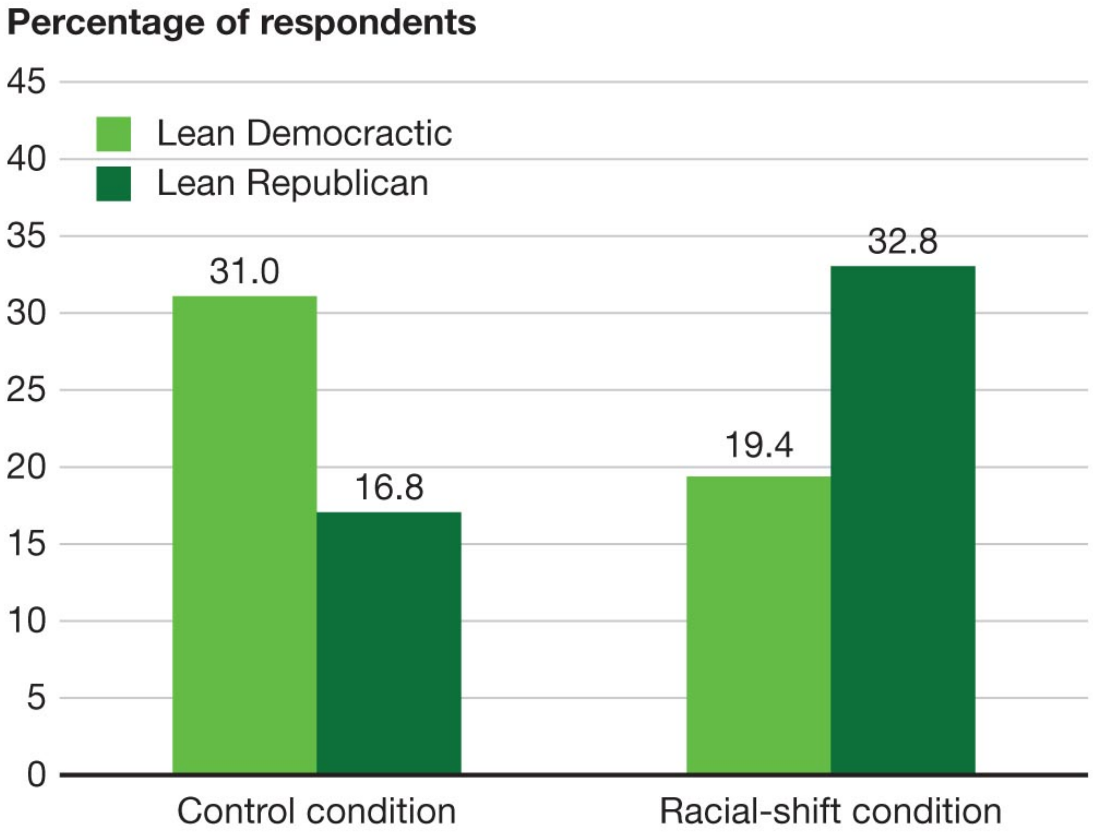

FIGURE 11.11 **THREAT FROM CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS** The graph shows the percentage of White respondents who said they leaned Republican or Democrat when told that California recently became a majority-minority state (experimental condition) or when told that the Hispanic population in the United States is equal to the Black population (control condition). The threat posed by changing demographics tends to make White members of the electorate

lean in a more politically conservative direction. Source: Adapted from Craig & Richeson (2014b).

Beliefs About Progress and Privilege

After reading this and the previous chapter, you will not be surprised to learn that members of dominant and marginalized groups tend to disagree about the level of inequality in society and about the amount of progress that’s been made in overcoming it. We would expect men to underestimate the male/female wage gap relative to the estimates made by women, Israelis to underestimate the Israeli/Palestinian wealth gap relative to the estimates made by Palestinians, and White Americans to underestimate the White/Black gap in access to health care relative to the estimates made by Black Americans.

Part of the reason that dominant and historically marginalized groups differ in such estimates is that they tend to measure progress differently. Members of dominant groups tend to measure progress in terms of where historically marginalized groups are now relative to where they were in the past, which often leads to an impression that considerable progress has been made. Members of marginalized groups, in contrast, tend to measure progress in terms of where they are now compared to what they’re aiming for—equality. Richard Eibach and Joyce Ehrlinger (2006) found that White and Black Americans differ in their assessments of racial progress in the United States in part because White Americans focus more on comparisons between the present and the past whereas Black Americans focus more on comparing the present to an ideal standard of full equality. Furthermore, when Eibach and Ehrlinger led their Black and White respondents to adopt the same frame of reference focused on either the past or the future goal, the two groups made similar assessments of how much racial progress there has been.

Other research has shown that different reference points are not the only reason that dominant and marginalized groups differ in their assessments of inequality and progress. According to what has come to be known as the Marley hypothesis, dominant and marginalized groups' assessments tend to differ because members of the dominant group generally know less about the history of oppression and disadvantage suffered by the other groups. The hypothesis is applied most often to differences between racial groups, and its name is inspired by the lyrics of reggae artist Bob Marley's song "Buffalo Soldier": "If you know your history, then you will know where you're coming from."

In the most direct test of this idea, students at predominantly White or Black universities were presented with statements about episodes of racism and asked to indicate which were true ("The FBI has employed illegal techniques . . . in an attempt to discredit African American political leaders during the civil rights movement") and which were false ("African American Paul Ferguson was shot outside his Alabama home for trying to integrate professional football"). The Black respondents were significantly better at distinguishing between the true and false statements, and this difference in knowledge about historical racism was a significant predictor of the difference between the White and Black students' perception of contemporary racism (Nelson, Adams, & Salter, 2013).

Particularly striking evidence of overly rosy views about racial equality comes from studies that ask survey respondents to estimate how White and Black Americans compare on various measures of economic success—annual income, employer-provided health benefits, wages among college graduates, household wealth, and so forth. These estimates reveal a belief on the part of *both* White and Black Americans that there has been much more progress toward equality than there actually has been. Respondents believe that the economic conditions of White and Black Americans today are much more equal than they actually are, especially when it comes to household wealth. As shown in **Figure 11.12**, respondents consistently underestimate the White/Black wealth gap, both in the past and now, with the largest discrepancy between perceived and actual values found in respondents' estimates of the current wealth gap between Blacks and Whites. Respondents estimated that for every $100 of wealth accumulated by the average White person in the United States, the average Black person has accumulated $25, when the actual figure for the average Black person is $5 (Kraus et al., 2019; Kraus, Rucker, & Richeson, 2017).

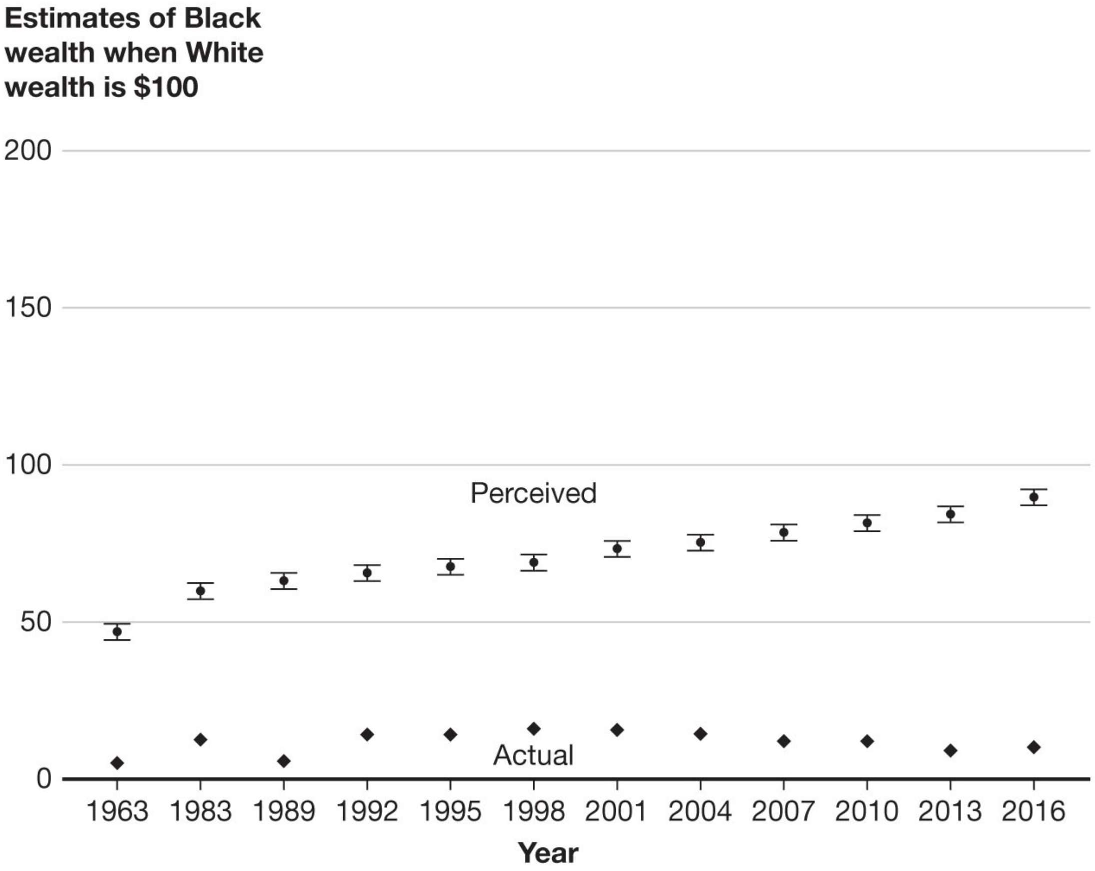

FIGURE 11.12 **ESTIMATES OF THE WHITE/BLACK WEALTH GAP** The graph shows survey respondents' estimates of the wealth

of the average Black family relative to every $100 of wealth accumulated by the average White family, with the actual values provided as a comparison. Respondents consistently underestimate the White/Black wealth gap, both historically and especially in contemporary times. Source: Adapted from Kraus et al. (2019).

These erroneous beliefs about progress toward racial equality are related to contemporary debates—often heated ones—about privilege and disadvantage. A number of pundits and bloggers have argued that society is waging "war" on White Christian men, complaints that reflect a conviction that the world caters to women, non-Christians, and non-Whites. That conviction is not shared by many women, atheists, Muslims, Hispanics, or Pacific Islanders. Here, too, what we have discussed in this and the previous chapter about ingroup/outgroup dynamics renders such divergent assessments entirely predictable.

But such beliefs are further advanced by some very basic features of how the mind works. Recall our discussion in Chapter 4 of the availability heuristic, whereby people assess the likelihood of something by the ease with which relevant instances come to mind. When it comes to life's hardships and benefits, one's own hardships and burdens tend to spring to mind more readily than one's benefits and privileges do. Davidai and Gilovich (2016) explained this difference by drawing an analogy to the headwinds and tailwinds experienced by long-distance runners or cyclists. When running or cycling into the wind, one is aware of the wind on a near-constant basis, as it is literally in one's face. When the wind or the course changes, the runner or cyclist is aware of being boosted along by the wind—but only briefly. The tailwind quickly recedes into the background and is no longer noticed. And what's true of headwinds and tailwinds while cycling or running is true of life's hardships and privileges generally. People have to pay attention to the obstacles in their paths in order to overcome them. They don’t have to pay attention to privileges they enjoy; they can simply—and mindlessly—reap the benefits they provide. This difference in availability helps explain why people think their parents were harder on them than on their siblings, why both Democrats and Republicans think the political landscape favors the other side, and why academics think their colleagues receive more favorable treatment by grant agencies and journal editors than they do themselves.

Kaidi Wu and David Dunning (2020) note that this difference in availability is compounded by the fact that many of the advantages enjoyed by members of dominant groups come in the form of the absence of burdens rather than the presence of perks—not being followed closely and suspiciously by salespeople when shopping, not having to put up with catcalls when walking down the street, not having to get one’s wheelchair over a steep curb, and so on. They note further that stimuli that are present command more attention than stimuli that are absent, a powerful asymmetry that sheds considerable light on the facts that even in the aftermath of the Me Too movement, only 28 percent of men think that men have it easier than women do (Horowitz, Parker, & Stepler, 2017) and that a majority of White Americans believe that they suffer from racial discrimination (Wilkins & Kaiser, 2014).

Other research shows that simply pointing out someone’s privilege generally does not lead them to accept that they have it (Phillips & Lowery, 2015, 2020). Indeed, this strategy often backfires: When people are presented with evidence that they have benefited from group-based privilege, they cite the personal hardships they’ve had to overcome in their lives. So what to do? How best to make members of dominant groups more aware of the privileges that often come with their position in society? The economist Robert Frank

(2016) offered some potentially helpful advice from his work on the role of luck in life. He notes that people tend to bristle when you mention the ways in which they have been lucky—being born into a wealthy family, receiving a quality education, not having to risk death from being conscripted to fight a war, or even having inherited good genes. But the same people who bristle when told how lucky they have been will often enthusiastically and gratefully recount various times when they have benefited from luck. Frank’s insight about luck applies equally to trying to get people to recognize their privilege: Ask, don’t tell.

LOOKING BACK

Although diverse societies can be unusually dynamic and productive, the existence of outgroup stereotypes and prejudice can impede efforts to make the benefits of that dynamism and productivity more widely available. Different groups in diverse societies vary in their assessments of how much progress has been made toward equality and how fair and just society is at any given moment. Disparate assessments of the advantages and disadvantages enjoyed by different groups can be exacerbated by the fact that people’s own hardships tend to be more accessible than their privileges, in part because many advantages in life come in the form of the (relatively invisible) absence of disadvantages. One way to get people to appreciate the privileges they enjoy is to ask them—but don’t tell them—what they are.

Glossary

Marley hypothesis

The claim that different racial groups make different assessments of the amount of racism in society today because they differ in their knowledge of racial history.

Chapter Review

SUMMARY

Social Dominance Theory

- *Social dominance theory* seeks to explain how unequal, hierarchical societies (which is to say all societies) prevent destabilizing conflict and endure for long periods of time.
- Societies preserve hierarchical systems through individual discrimination (which helps those at the top preserve their advantages and makes it harder for those at the bottom to get ahead), institutional discrimination (e.g., laws and norms that reinforce the hierarchy), and behavioral asymmetries (i.e., patterns of thought and behavior, such as self-fulfilling prophecies, that preserve inequality).
- These processes play out with the aid of ideologies that justify inequality, such as the belief in pure meritocracy, the belief in a just world, and mistaken beliefs about how often people rise from the lower rungs of the economic ladder to the upper rungs.

The Stereotype Content Model

- The stereotypes that people hold of others are structured along the two dimensions of competence and warmth.
- Groups thought to be both competent and warm tend to be admired, those seen as competent but cold tend to be envied, those seen as warm but incompetent tend to be pitied, and those seen as neither warm nor competent are viewed with contempt.

The Effects of Stereotypes and Prejudice on the Individual

- Broadly held stereotypes and prejudices directly affect the lives of members of marginalized groups through, for example, discrimination in hiring and promotion and in the justice system.
- Members of marginalized groups face disadvantages that result not only from acts of commission but also from omissions, such as not being portrayed or discussed in the media in proportion to their demographic profile.
- Members of stigmatized groups suffer from attributional ambiguity. They have to ask themselves whether others' negative or positive behaviors toward them are due to prejudice or to some factor unrelated to their group membership.
- The performance of members of stigmatized groups can be impaired by *stereotype threat*, or the fear that they will confirm others' stereotypes.
- Members of marginalized groups are sometimes tempted to try to hide their group status, an effort that is associated with physical and psychological costs.

The Effects of Stereotypes and Prejudice on Social Interaction

- Although intergroup interactions can be illuminating and productive, they are also often fraught. Among other concerns, members of each group might think that members of other groups do not want to interact with them.
- Between-group interactions also take place under a cloud of known stereotypes. Knowing that they are commonly thought to be cold, White people often try to stress warmth when interacting with people of color, leading to a "competence downshift" that can disrupt their

interactions in unanticipated ways. People of color, especially those who are politically conservative, often do the opposite, trying to stress competence when interacting with White people.

The Effects of Stereotypes and Prejudice on Society

- In diverse societies with widespread stereotypes and prejudices, there is less support for a robust social safety net, which leads to greater inequality.
- Lack of interest in a robust social safety net is exacerbated by the majority group’s fears about changing societal demographics.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Suppose a woman named Taylor was applying for a job at an accounting firm, and applicants had to complete a math test as part of the on-site interview process. If Taylor met her older male interviewer just before taking the math test and he (inappropriately) exclaimed, “You’re Taylor? I was expecting, well, a man,” what impact might that have on Taylor’s test performance, interview performance, and eventual likelihood of getting the job?
2. In what ways is the tendency for people to pay more attention to their headwinds than to their tailwinds helpful or useful? In what ways does it create problems?
3. Suppose Taylor gets the job at the accounting firm and quickly rises through the ranks, eventually finding a position in middle management. How might her personality as a hard-charging, very direct person lead to some problems in her quest to rise further to senior management, when so many members of the existing senior

management team are no less hard-charging—a trait that did not hinder their careers? What would you advise her to do to overcome those problems?

4. Mindful of an angry anti-elite populism gripping the country, your university (which sends a number of people into “the elite” each year) hires you to try to improve the public perception of members of the professional class. What would you recommend?

The answer guidelines for the Think About It questions can be found at the back of the book . . .

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CHAPTER
12

Groups

Why might group decisions have worse consequences than independent thinking does?

Is solitary confinement inhumane?

Why do famous people sometimes abuse their positions of power?

OUTLINE

- The Nature and Purpose of Group Living
- Social Facilitation
- Group Decision Making
- Power and Social Hierarchy
- Deindividuation and the Psychology of Mobs

TODD ASHKER, A CONVICTED MURDERER, spent over 20 years in the Security Housing Unit, or SHU, in Pelican Bay, a maximum-security prison in fog-filled Crescent City, California. The purpose of the SHU was to isolate gang members from other gang members. (Ashker was a member of the White supremacist Aryan Brotherhood.) In solitary confinement in the SHU, Ashker spent 23 hours a day by himself in a windowless cell about the size of a parking space, often staring at the walls for hours. He could exercise for 1 hour a day, by himself, in a moldy, enclosed space, with no clear view of the sky. He could see no other prisoners and received his meals through a slot in the door to his cell. When his family and friends were permitted to visit, he was not allowed to touch them.

When social psychologist Craig Haney first interviewed a sample of SHU prisoners, he found the effects of solitary confinement to be profound: 70 percent of SHU prisoners showed signs of impending nervous breakdown, 40 percent suffered from hallucinations, and 27 percent had suicidal ideation. One SHU inmate summed it up aptly: “I would rather have gotten the death penalty.”

In the despair of solitary confinement, Ashker did something extraordinary: He formed a group with the leaders of rival gangs in cells nearby. Desperate for human contact, prisoners began calling out to one another from the exercise room. In a series of conversations, the leaders of the rival gangs talked about their parents and grandparents, their children and spouses, their neighborhoods and pasts, and the wrongs they had done. They talked about the suffering produced by solitary confinement. Moved by these conversations, Ashker and his neighbors called for a truce between the rival gangs. And on July 8, 2013, Ashker led a hunger strike that, through informal word of mouth, involved upward of 30,000 prisoners in California, all protesting solitary confinement as a violation of the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution, which prohibits the use of cruel and unusual punishment.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GROUP LIFE A prison cell (right) and the exercise area (left) in the Security Housing Unit at Pelican Bay.

Ashker’ s efforts inspired a team of lawyers to sue the state of California to free prisoners from solitary confinement in the SHU. The suit involved several social psychologists, who relied on some of the findings you are learning about to make the case that solitary confinement is cruel and unusual punishment. Humans have a drive-like need to belong and connect (see Chapter 9); in fact, isolation, exclusion, and rejection activate the pain centers of the brain much like physical harm does, and when humans are deprived of touch, their stress system can go into overdrive. In 2015, the case was settled in favor of the prisoners, and more than 2,000 people across California were moved out of solitary confinement.

There are many lessons to be learned from Todd Ashker’ s experience of solitary confinement. When we are denied the chance to connect and live in groups, we suffer in substantial ways. Our humanity is found in group life. ■

The Nature and Purpose of Group Living

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe what makes a collection of individuals a group.
- Identify three evolutionary benefits of groups.

> “No man is an island, / entire of itself; / every man is a piece of the continent, / a part of the main.”
>
> —JOHN DONNE, ENGLISH POET

What happened to Todd Ashker in the SHU at Pelican Bay speaks to our fundamentally social nature. Humans and all large primates (except orangutans) live in groups, so group life must provide advantages. Today it’s recognized that the human capacity to form groups has helped us meet many of the challenges of survival and ensured the reproduction of our genes: In groups we provide care for our vulnerable offspring, find protection from predators, enjoy increased efficiency in acquiring and sharing food, and bolster our defense against aggressors. These benefits of group living are so crucial to survival that we have a psychological need to be with others and belong to groups (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Correll & Park, 2005).

But what exactly is a group? This is not an easy question to answer, since there are so many types of groups, and they don’t always share many features. The members of a soccer team are clearly a group, but most people wouldn’t consider the members of a large lecture course to be a group. Similarly, most people would say that the individuals riding together in an elevator aren’t a group. But suppose the elevator breaks down, and those inside must figure out how to escape or summon help. Most would say that the people in the elevator now seem more like a real group. But why?

A group has been described as “a collection of individuals who have relations to one another that make them interdependent to some significant degree” (Cartwright & Zander, 1968, p. 46). Thus, the people in the functioning elevator don’t make up a group because they’re not interdependent. But once the elevator breaks down and they must decide on joint action (or whether to take joint action), they become interdependent and hence more of a group. There are degrees of interdependence, of course, and therefore degrees of “groupness” (McGrath, 1984). The members of a family are more of a “real” group than are participants in a seminar, and seminar attendees, in turn, are more of a group than are students in a large lecture course. By this reasoning, a nation’s citizens make up something of a group, but they are less of a group than are the members of a smaller community, who interact more often and are more directly dependent on one another.

This chapter explores how groups function, how they make decisions, and how group decision making can go wrong. It also examines how people gain and use power within groups. Finally, the chapter explores how orderly groups can devolve into unruly mobs when the members’ personal identities are diminished.

Social Facilitation

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe the three elements of Zajonc’s theory of mere presence.
- Differentiate the mere presence hypothesis from the evaluation apprehension hypothesis.
- Define social loafing and explain how it differs from mere presence effects.

Suppose you’re by yourself as you try to perfect a skill, such as mastering a tricky dance move or working through the intricacies of conjugating French verbs. You feel you’re making progress when someone—a perfect stranger, your mother, or even, say, Amy Schumer or W. Kamau Bell—takes a seat nearby and proceeds to observe. What does this other person’s presence do to your performance? Does it give you the energy and focus you need to bring your performance to new heights? Or do you become so nervous and distracted that your performance suffers?

Initial Research

Norman Triplett (1898) is often credited with conducting the first experiment on the effect of other people’s presence on human performance. Triplett was a bicycling enthusiast (or “wheelman,” as they were known at the time). After reviewing speed records put out by the Racing Board of the League of American Wheelmen, Triplett noticed that the fastest times were recorded when cyclists competed directly against one another on the same track at the same time. Slower speed records were obtained when cyclists raced alone against the clock. This observation led Triplett to hypothesize that the presence of others tended to facilitate, or enhance, human performance.

Triplett realized, however, that cycling records did not offer the best test of his hypothesis, so he conducted what is widely considered social psychology’s first experiment (Triplett, 1898). He invited 40 children to his laboratory and had them turn a fishing reel as fast as they could. Each child did so on six trials. On three of the trials, the child was alone; on the other three trials, another child was alongside doing the same thing. Triplett found that the children tended to turn the reel faster when in the presence of another child engaged in the same activity. The presence of others appeared to facilitate their performance. Research on this subject thus came to be known as social facilitation research.

> “The bodily presence of another contestant participating simultaneously in the race serves to liberate latent energy not ordinarily available.”
>
> —NORMAN TRIPLETT

A number of subsequent experiments extended Triplett’s findings in two important ways. First, the same effects were obtained when the others were not doing the same thing (that is, not “coacting”) but were merely present as an audience of passive observers (Gates, 1924; Travis, 1925). Second, the same effect was observed in a vast number of animal species, indicating that the phenomenon is quite general and fundamental. For example, animals as diverse as dogs, fish, armadillos, opossums, and frogs have been shown to eat more when in the presence of other members of the same species than when alone (Boice, Quanty, & Williams, 1974; Platt & James, 1966; Platt, Yaksh, & Darby, 1967; S. Ross & Ross, 1949; Uematsu, 1970). Ants dig more earth (S. C. Chen, 1937), fruit flies do more preening (Connolly, 1968), and centipedes run faster through mazes (Hosey et al., 1985) when together than when alone. For humans and nonhumans alike, the presence of others seems to facilitate performance.

SOCIAL FACILITATION AND COMPETITION Performance is typically enhanced in the presence of others when the activity is well learned, as cycling is for Sina Frei, of Switzerland, shown here in the 2021 UCI Mountain Bike World Cup in Snowshoe, West Virginia.

But numerous exceptions emerged soon after Triplett’s original findings. Floyd Allport (1920), for example, asked undergraduate students to refute philosophical arguments as best they could in a 5-minute period. The students provided higher-quality arguments when working alone than when working in the presence of another student. The presence of others has also been shown to inhibit performance on arithmetic problems, memory tasks, and maze learning (Dashiell, 1930; Pessin, 1933; Pessin & Husband, 1933).

Zajonc’s Theory of Mere Presence

For a time, then, the best generalization available about the effects of others’ presence on performance was that it sometimes helps and sometimes hurts—not a terribly satisfying answer. It’s about as helpful as an expert saying we might be headed for another economic crash, but then again, we might not. Although that may be all you’d expect from someone trying to predict which way the economy is going, you’d probably want more from researchers studying a simpler process like social facilitation.

Nearly 70 years after Triplett’s discovery, social psychologist Robert Zajonc offered an elegant theory to account for the divergent findings on this topic. Zajonc (1965) argued that the presence of others, indeed the *mere* presence of others, tends to facilitate performance on simple or well-learned tasks, but it hinders performance on difficult or novel tasks. Even more important, Zajonc’s theory explained *why* the presence of others has these effects.

Zajonc’s theory has three components (**Figure 12.1**). First, the mere presence of others makes us more aroused. Other people are dynamic and unpredictable stimuli, capable of doing almost anything at any time. We therefore need to be alert, or aroused, in their presence so we can react to what they might do.

Second, arousal tends to make us more rigid and narrowly focused, in that we become more inclined to do what we’re already automatically inclined to do. In the language Zajonc used, when we are aroused, we are more likely to make a dominant response. Think of it like this: In any situation, you can respond in a variety of ways, arranged in a hierarchy according to their likelihood of happening. Whatever you're most inclined to do in that situation is at the top of the hierarchy and is thus the dominant response. When we are aroused, Zajonc argued, we are even more inclined to make that dominant response.

The third component of Zajonc's theory specifies that the increase in dominant response tendencies facilitates performance on simple tasks and inhibits performance on complex tasks. For easy or well-learned tasks, the dominant response is likely to be the correct one. In fact, that's what it means for a task to be easy or well learned. Thus, the presence of other people, by facilitating the dominant response, facilitates the correct response and improves performance. In contrast, for difficult or novel tasks, the dominant response is not likely to be the correct response. Again, that's what it means for a task to be difficult or novel. Thus, the presence of others facilitates an *incorrect* response and hinders performance.

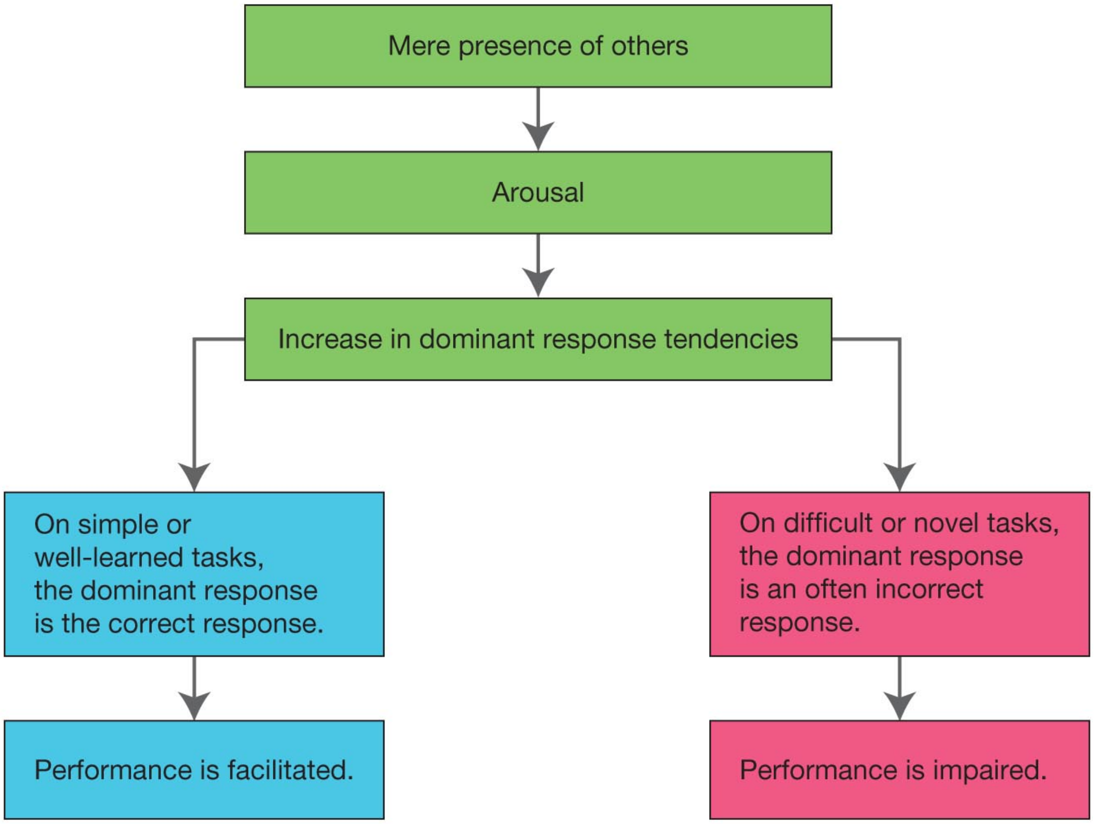
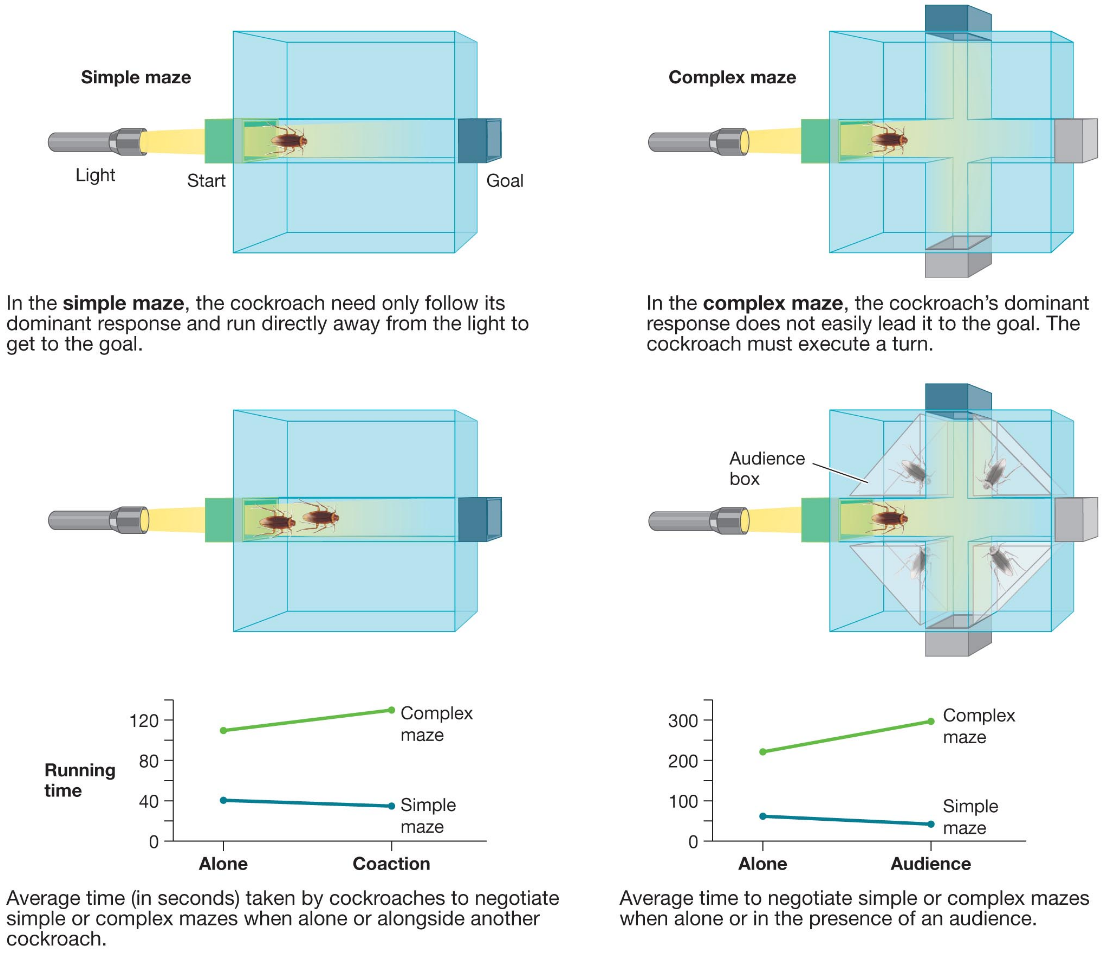

Mere presence of others
Arousal
Increase in dominant response tendencies
On simple or well-learned tasks, the dominant response is the correct response.
On difficult or novel tasks, the dominant response is an often incorrect response.
Performance is facilitated.
Performance is impaired.

FIGURE 12.1 **ZAJONC’S MODEL OF SOCIAL FACILITATION** The presence of others (indeed, their mere presence) increases arousal and facilitates dominant response tendencies. This improves performance on easy or well-learned tasks but hinders performance on difficult or novel tasks.

TESTING THE THEORY Zajonc’s theory has been tested in a number of studies across species. In one study, Zajonc and his colleagues placed cockroaches in the start box of one of two mazes and then shone a light at the start box (Zajonc, Heingartner, & Herman, 1969). Cockroaches instinctively flee from light. In the simple maze (a “runway”), getting to the darkened chamber was easy, simply requiring the cockroach do what it does instinctively: run away from the light (its dominant response). In contrast, getting to the darkened chamber in the complex maze was more challenging, requiring the cockroach to execute a turn. In this study, then, the two mazes represented two conditions. In the simple maze, the dominant response—the cockroach’s instinct to flee from light—led to the goal; in the complex maze, it did not.

Zajonc had the cockroaches run one of these two mazes either alone or with another cockroach. He predicted that cockroaches running the simple maze would get to the goal box more quickly when together than when alone and that those running the complex maze together would take longer to reach the chamber. That’s exactly what happened: The presence of another cockroach facilitated performance on the simple maze but hindered performance on the complex maze (**Figure 12.2**).


Simple maze
Light
Start
Goal
Complex maze
Audience box
Running time
120
80
40
0
Alone
Coaction
Complex maze
Simple maze
300
200
100
0
Alone
Audience
Complex maze
Simple maze

In the **simple maze**, the cockroach need only follow its dominant response and run directly away from the light to get to the goal.

In the **complex maze**, the cockroach’s dominant response does not easily lead it to the goal. The cockroach must execute a turn.

Average time (in seconds) taken by cockroaches to negotiate simple or complex mazes when alone or alongside another cockroach.

Average time to negotiate simple or complex mazes when alone or in the presence of an audience.

FIGURE 12.2 **SOCIAL FACILITATION IN OTHER SPECIES** For cockroaches, as for humans, the presence of others increases dominant response tendencies, leading to better performance on easy tasks (in this case, the simple maze)

and worse performance on difficult tasks (the complex maze). Source: Adapted from Zajonc et al., 1969.

COACTING VERSUS MERE PRESENCE To show that the *mere* presence of another cockroach—as opposed to some other factor such as competition—has these effects, Zajonc added a condition in which the cockroach ran the maze with other cockroaches merely present as a passive “audience.” To create this condition, Zajonc built a set of plexiglass boxes, or “grandstands,” to flank the two mazes, and he filled them with observer cockroaches. Again, as Figure 12.2 indicates, the presence of the observing cockroaches facilitated performance on the simple maze but inhibited performance on the complex maze.

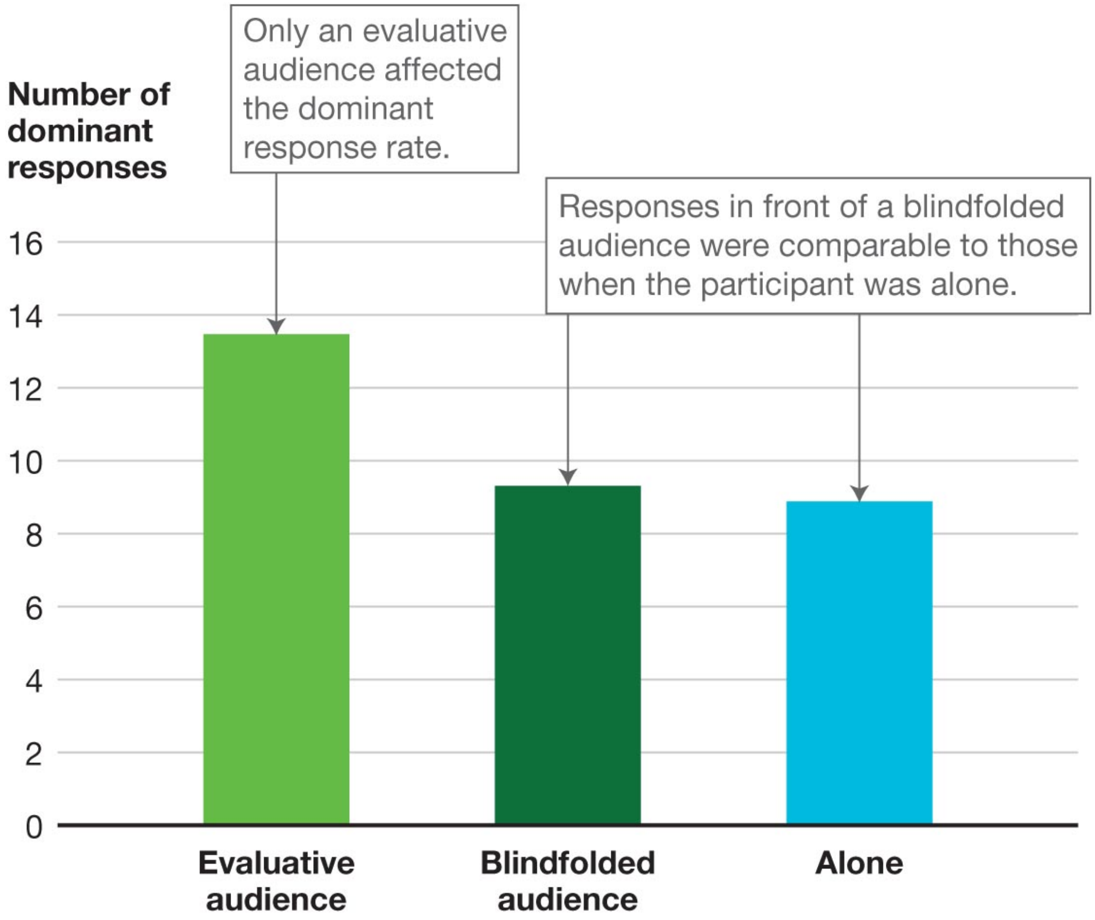
Subsequent tests of Zajonc’s theory turned to the real-world behavior of our own species (Ben-Zeev, Fein, & Inzlicht, 2005). For example, consider one study conducted at a university pool hall (Michaels et al., 1982). College students playing recreational pool were unobtrusively observed and deemed skilled or unskilled based on their performance. Zajonc’s theory predicts that the presence of an audience should make the skilled players perform better (for them, the task is easy) and the unskilled players perform worse (for them, the task is difficult). To test this prediction, the experimenters walked up to the pool tables and watched. As expected, the good players did even better than before, and the poor players did even worse.

Mere Presence or Evaluation Apprehension?

Zajonc’s theory has stood the test of time, with many studies finding that the presence of others tends to facilitate performance on easy tasks and hinder performance on difficult tasks (S. L. Thomas et al., 2002). One element of Zajonc's theory, however, has been disputed: whether it is the *mere* presence of other people that increases arousal. When most people reflect on why they would be aroused in the presence of others, it's not just their presence that seems decisive. Instead, it's evaluation apprehension—a concern about looking bad in the eyes of others, about being evaluated—that seems to be important (Blascovich et al., 1999; Cottrell et al., 1968; Seta & Seta, 1992). Several studies have investigated whether it is only when subjects feel they are being evaluated that they show arousal and thereby facilitation on easy tasks and impairment on difficult tasks.

TESTING FOR EVALUATION APPREHENSION To test the hypothesis that evaluation apprehension, not mere presence, is the critical element underlying social facilitation, an experiment needs to compare participants' performance across three conditions: when alone, when in front of an evaluative audience, and when in front of an audience that cannot evaluate the subject's performance. In one such study, the investigators cleverly created a response hierarchy of dominant and nondominant responses in their participants (Cottrell et al., 1968). They gave the participants a list of ten nonsense words (such as *nansoma*, *paritaf*, and *zabulon*) and had them pronounce two of the ten words once, two words twice, two words 5 times, two words 10 times, and two words 25 times. The more-practiced words therefore became the dominant response. After this training phase of the experiment, the test phase began. Participants were told that these same words would be flashed on a screen very briefly (some so briefly they might not be visible) and that they were to identify each word as it was shown. If they couldn't identify a word, they should guess. None of the target words was actually shown, so participants were guessing on every trial (this task is thus known as a *pseudorecognition test*).

The participants performed this task either (1) alone, (2) in the presence of two other students who watched the proceedings attentively, or (3) in the mere presence condition, in front of blindfolded “observers,” who, it was explained, were preparing for another experiment (and obviously couldn’t evaluate participants). The researchers were interested in how often the participants gave a dominant response—by guessing the most familiar word (those they had pronounced 25 times)—across the three conditions.



Only an evaluative audience affected the dominant response rate.

Responses in front of a blindfolded audience were comparable to those when the participant was alone.

FIGURE 12.3 **EVALUATION APPREHENSION AND SOCIAL FACILITATION** This graph shows the average number of dominant responses made by participants who were responding alone, next to a blindfolded audience (who therefore couldn’t monitor or evaluate their performance), or next to an attentive audience (who could evaluate their performance). Participants were more likely

to exhibit dominant responses in the presence of an attentive audience but not a merely present, blindfolded audience. Source: Adapted from Cottrell et al., 1968.

The results, shown in **Figure 12.3**, highlight the importance of evaluation apprehension. Participants performing in front of an evaluative audience made more dominant responses than those performing alone did, but those performing in front of a blindfolded audience did not. This experiment seems to demonstrate that it’s the concern about others as a source of evaluation, and not their mere presence, that’s responsible for social facilitation.

TESTING FOR MERE PRESENCE More careful scrutiny, however, gives rise to doubts about the results of the experiment just described. Specifically, although participants in the alone condition were alone in an objective sense (no one else was physically present), they may not have been *psychologically* alone. After all, they were in an experiment, one in which they were asked to perform a strange task. It seems likely that they might have felt apprehensive about the prospect of their performance being surreptitiously recorded (which it was). Thus, the alone condition used in this study may not have been a “true” alone condition. To adequately test Zajonc’s theory, then, an experiment needs a condition in which participants *feel* that they are truly alone.

Hazel Markus (1978) carried out such a study, showing that the mere presence of another person, in the absence of any concern about that person being evaluative, is indeed sufficient to create arousal that facilitates performance on an easy task and impairs performance on a difficult task. Upon arriving for the experiment, participants sat in an adjoining room to wait for the other participants to arrive. While there, they had to dress for the experiment, which required them to take off their own shoes and put on a pair of lab socks over their own socks, a pair of oversized lab shoes, and a lab coat. The participants did all this and waited, in vain, for the “other participants” to arrive. In reality, there were no other participants. After 10 minutes, the experimenter reappeared and stated that the other participants were apparently not coming, so the experimental session was over. The participants were then instructed to change back into their own clothes.

Unbeknownst to participants, all of this changing of clothes was surreptitiously observed and timed through a one-way mirror. Markus was interested in how quickly participants could perform the novel tasks of putting on and taking off the unfamiliar lab coat, socks, and shoes as well as how quickly they could perform the well-learned tasks of taking off and putting on their own, very familiar, shoes. Participants did this in one of three conditions: alone, with another person watching attentively, or in the mere presence of a repairman working on a piece of apparatus with his back to the participant.

Even though the participants did not think they were “performing,” Zajonc’s theory predicted that they should change their own clothes faster and the novel clothes more slowly when in the mere presence of another person. As shown in **Table 12.1**, that’s exactly what happened. Participants took off and put on their own shoes more quickly, and the experimenter’s socks, shoes, and coat more slowly, when in the presence of another person—even when the other person had his back turned and was unable to observe. Note again that the effects were stronger for an attentive audience than for a merely present audience, which suggests that evaluation apprehension can add to a person’s arousal and thus intensify the effect of mere presence. These results and those of similar investigations support Zajonc’s theory that the mere presence of another person does indeed have an effect on performance (Platania & Moran, 2001; B. H. Schmitt et al., 1986).

TABLE 12.1 SOCIAL FACILITATION AND THE EFFECT OF AN AUDIENCE

	Alone	Merely present audience	Attentive audience
Well-learned tasks (own shoes)	16.5 seconds	13.5 seconds	11.7 seconds
Novel tasks (lab shoes, socks, and coat)	28.8 seconds	32.7 seconds	33.9 seconds
Source: Adapted from Markus, 1978.			

DOMINANT RESPONSES AND SOCIAL FACILITATION People tend to do better on well-learned tasks but worse on difficult or poorly mastered tasks in the presence of others. Presumably, the children who know the material well will do better on these standardized tests in the presence of other test takers because their dominant responses will be correct. But children who don’ t know the material well will be more likely to give incorrect answers in the presence of others.

Beyond Social Facilitation

One hundred years of research on social facilitation has made it clear that the mere presence of others is sufficient to increase arousal and thus facilitate performance on well-learned tasks and inhibit performance on novel tasks. It’ s also clear, however, that people are complex stimuli and that their presence can have a variety of effects that overlay the influence of mere presence. Evaluation apprehension, for instance, can intensify arousal and lead to more pronounced social facilitation effects.

One phenomenon that runs counter to standard social facilitation effects is social loafing, the tendency to exert less effort when working on a group task in which individual contributions cannot be monitored (Hoeksema-van Orden, Gaillard, & Buunk, 1998; Karau & Williams, 1995; Plaks & Higgins, 2000; K. H. Price, Harrison, & Gavin, 2006; K. D. Williams, Harkins, & Latané, 1981). If you and your friends have to move a couch up a flight of stairs, for example, you might be tempted to hold less than your fair share of weight and hope that your friends' more vigorous efforts will get the job done. In these situations, people often loaf because their contributions are not seen as crucial to success and because their individual contributions—and hence they themselves—can't be assessed.

SOCIAL LOAFING When their contributions cannot be individually monitored, people tend to loaf, working less hard than they would otherwise and relying on the efforts of others to get the job done.

LOOKING BACK

Even the simplest group situation—the mere presence of a single other person—can influence performance, as can concerns about being evaluated. The presence of others is arousing, and arousal accentuates a person’s existing performance tendencies. Easy tasks are made easier, and difficult tasks are made more difficult. In group tasks when individuals’ contributions are hard to monitor, people may engage in social loafing.

Glossary

social facilitation

Initially a term for enhanced performance in the presence of others; now a broader term for the effect, positive or negative, of the presence of others on performance.

dominant response

In a person’s hierarchy of possible responses in any context, the response that person is most likely to make.

evaluation apprehension

People’s concern about how they might appear or be evaluated in the eyes of others.

social loafing

The tendency to exert less effort when working on a group task in which individual contributions cannot be monitored.

Group Decision Making

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe symptoms of groupthink and two antecedent conditions for it.
- Define group polarization and explain how it is produced by persuasive arguments and social comparison.

When people come together in groups, one of the most important things they do is make decisions. Groups that can’t decide what to do or how to act don’t function well. They wallow, bicker, backstab, and often split apart. You won’t be surprised to learn, then, that social psychologists have spent considerable energy studying how groups make decisions and what makes those decisions better or worse (Kerr, MacCoun, & Kramer, 1996; Laughlin et al., 2006; Levine & Moreland, 1990, 1998; Rose, 2011; Sommers, 2006).

Much of the research on group decision making has been guided by the assumption that decisions made by groups are typically better than decisions made by individuals. The idea here is that many heads are better than one. And indeed, when groups and individuals are presented with problems for which there are precise, factual answers, groups are more likely than the average individual to come up with the correct solution (Laughlin & Ellis, 1986).

Yet in many contexts, group decisions are no better than those made by individuals. The key to understanding such contexts is to recognize that although arriving at a best possible solution to a problem may be the *group’s* most important goal, it may not be the most important goal for any of the individual group members. Individuals may be more concerned with how they will be judged by everyone else, how they can avoid hurting someone’s feelings, and how they can dodge responsibility if things go wrong. When people get together to make group decisions, these kinds of concerns can undermine the goal of arriving at the best possible decision.

> “[When people] come together . . . they may surpass, collectively and as a body, the quality of the few best. . . . When there are many [who contribute to the process of deliberation], each can bring his share of goodness and moral prudence.”
>
> —ARISTOTLE

Groupthink

In settings where social harmony is important and the costs of making an incorrect decision are minimal, it’s hardly surprising that group pressure to be like-minded can lead to defective decision making. But what happens when life and death are literally at stake and the incentives to “get it right” are high? In those contexts, surely people wouldn’t go along with faulty reasoning merely to preserve group harmony or to avoid embarrassment, would they? In fact, they would—and they often do.

Irving Janis carefully analyzed a number of decisions made at the very highest levels of the U.S. government and found evidence of just this sort of faulty, and often calamitous, group decision making (Janis, 1972, 1982; see also Esser, 1998). Here are a few of the fiascos Janis studied:

- The Kennedy administration’s decision to initiate the overthrow of Fidel Castro’s regime by depositing a group of CIA-trained Cuban refugees on the beaches of Cuba’s Bay of Pigs but failing to provide air cover (The refugees were captured in short order, thus humiliating the United States internationally—both for its role in trying to undermine a sovereign nation and for initially denying its involvement in the affair.)
- The Johnson administration’s decision to increase the number of American soldiers fighting in Vietnam (This policy failed to advance U.S. objectives in the region and substantially increased the number of lives lost.)
- The conclusion by the U.S. naval high command that extra precautions were not needed at the Pearl Harbor naval base despite warnings of an imminent attack by the Japanese (This had severe repercussions on December 7, 1941, the “day of infamy,” when the Japanese destroyed a large part of the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor in a surprise attack.)

Janis attributed these disastrous decisions to groupthink, a kind of faulty thinking by highly cohesive groups in which the critical scrutiny that should be devoted to the issues at hand is subverted by social pressures to reach consensus. Other investigators have made the same claim about more recent disasters, such as the ill-fated launches of the space shuttles *Challenger* and *Columbia* (Esser & Lindoerfer, 1989; Glanz & Schwartz, 2003; Rose, 2011).

SYMPTOMS AND SOURCES OF GROUPTHINK According to Janis, groupthink is the compromised decision making of a group, fueled by a shallow examination of information, a narrow consideration of alternatives, and a sense of invulnerability or moral superiority (Janis, 1972). Especially under the direction of a strong leader, groups may discourage members from coming forward with dissenting ideas and assessments, ignore or reject alternative viewpoints, and end up overly confident about the correctness of their proposed solutions.

Thus, the very source of a group’s potentially superior decision making—the airing of differing opinions and the presentation of varied facts and perspectives—never comes into play (**Figure 12.4**).

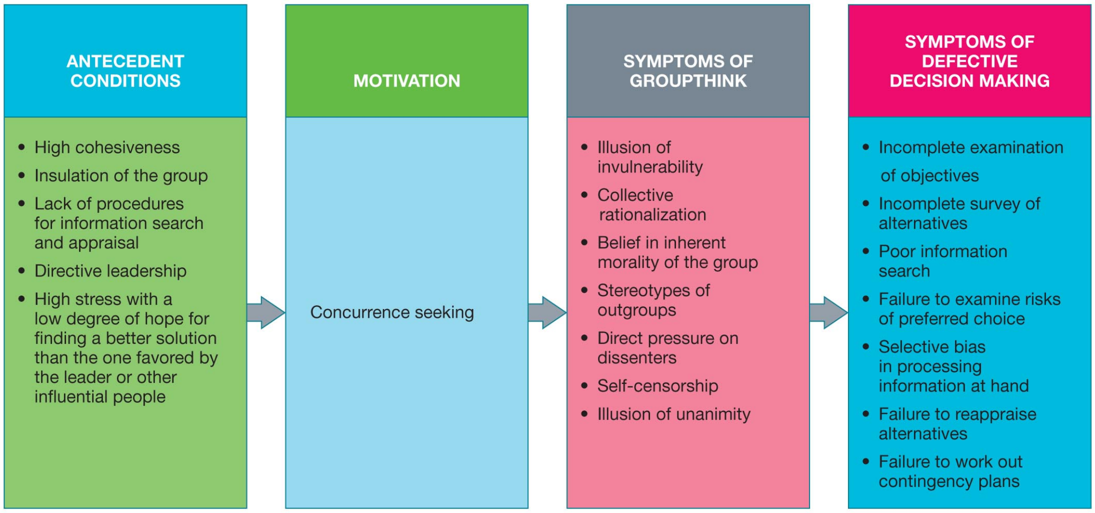

ANTECEDENT CONDITIONS
• High cohesiveness
• Insulation of the group
• Lack of procedures for information search and appraisal
• Directive leadership
• High stress with a low degree of hope for finding a better solution than the one favored by the leader or other influential people
MOTIVATION
Concurrence seeking
SYMPTOMS OF GROUPTHINK
• Illusion of invulnerability
• Collective rationalization
• Belief in inherent morality of the group
• Stereotypes of outgroups
• Direct pressure on dissenters
• Self-censorship
• Illusion of unanimity
SYMPTOMS OF DEFECTIVE DECISION MAKING
• Incomplete examination of objectives
• Incomplete survey of alternatives
• Poor information search
• Failure to examine risks of preferred choice
• Selective bias in processing information at hand
• Failure to reappraise alternatives
• Failure to work out contingency plans

FIGURE 12.4 **ELEMENTS OF JANIS’S GROUPTHINK HYPOTHESIS** Certain conditions lead decision-making groups to be excessively concerned with seeking consensus, which detracts from a full, rational analysis of the existing problem. Source: Adapted from Janis & Mann, 1977, p. 132.

The historical record shows that social psychological forces have had a hand in numerous instances of faulty decision making, although the evidence gathered to test Janis’s thesis has been mixed (Aldag & Fuller, 1993; Rose, 2011; Tetlock et al., 1992). Conceptual questions remain unresolved, such as whether cohesiveness, insularity, and high stress tend to occur together or are distinct variables that each might lead to groupthink in separate ways. And are the factors that Janis identified *essential* ingredients of this sort of faulty decision making? (Henningsen et al., 2006). Nonetheless, his observations point to social factors that can lead to terrible decisions as well as factors that can improve group decision making.

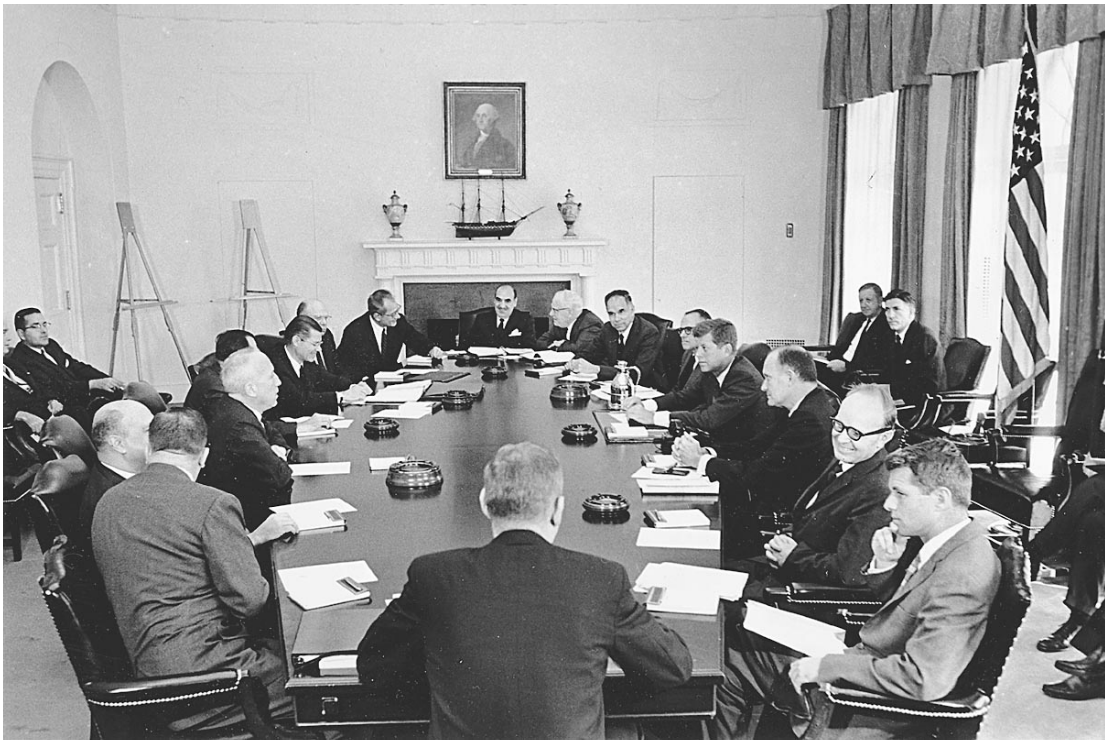
For example, strong, directive leaders who insist that their preferences drive the group’s deliberation sometimes intimidate even the most accomplished group members, stifle vigorous discussion, and undermine effective decision making (Hildreth & Anderson, 2016; McCauley, 1998). Also, as Janis contends, at times the issue under consideration is so stressful that groups seek the reassurance and comfort of premature or illusory consensus. In addition, both strong leaders and the drive to find consensus breed self-censorship—that is, the decision to withhold information or opinions. Janis reports that Arthur Schlesinger, a member of President Kennedy’s inner circle during the Bay of Pigs deliberations, was ever afterward haunted

> for having kept so silent during those crucial discussions in the Cabinet Room. . . . I can only explain my failure to do more than raise a few timid questions by reporting that one’s impulse to blow the whistle on this nonsense was simply undone by the circumstances of the discussion. (Quoted in Janis, 1982, p. 39)

Some of the participants in that fiasco have written that the pressures to agree with the flawed plan were so great because the group was newly created and the participants were reluctant to step on each other’s toes. In contrast, by the time that same group came together to deliberate over subsequent crises, the group members had been around the block with one another and were more willing to offer and accept criticism without worrying so much about threatening their relationships.

THE DANGERS OF GROUPTHINK Postmortem analyses of the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 identified examples of apparent groupthink on the part of those responsible for the decision.

PREVENTING GROUPTHINK In light of the perils of groupthink, Janis offers several ideas for improving group deliberations (see also Lu, Yuan, & McLeod, 2012). Freer, more vigorous discussion is likely to take place, for example, if group leaders refrain from making their opinions or preferences known at the beginning. Groups can also avoid tunnel vision and the illusion of consensus by making sure the group isn't cut off from outside input. People who weren't part of the early stages of a discussion can provide a fresh perspective and may be able to put the brakes on any rash actions that might otherwise develop. Finally, designate a devil's advocate in the group—that is, tasking one person with bringing to the group's attention any weaknesses in the group's deliberations and plans—can help safeguard against rash action and unsound argumentation.



PREVENTING GROUPTHINK John F. Kennedy's cabinet met during the Cuban missile crisis to try to resolve the impasse with the Soviet Union over Soviet missiles in Cuba. They took steps to avoid groupthink by encouraging vigorous debate and making recommendations based on unbiased analysis.

In addition to studying foreign policy fiascos, Janis also examined a number of highly successful decisions, including the Kennedy administration's handling of the Cuban missile crisis, and claimed that the deliberations that led to these successful decisions were not marked by symptoms of groupthink. Janis noted how President Kennedy and his advisers, embarrassed by the Bay of Pigs disaster, took steps to ensure that all future policies would be evaluated more thoroughly from then on. In the case of the Cuban missile crisis, the president frequently excused himself from the group so as not to constrain the discussion. He also brought in outside experts to critique his advisers' analysis and proposals, and he appointed specific individuals (his brother

Robert as well as Theodore Sorensen) to act as devil’s advocates. (See **Box 12.1** for other behaviors that make for smarter group decision making.) These safeguards seem to have paid off: The negotiations that kept Soviet missiles out of Cuba were one of the enduring highlights of the tragically short Kennedy administration.

BOX 12.1

FOCUS ON WORK

Collective Intelligence and Group Performance in Ever More Diverse Workplaces

The study of groupthink is largely focused on the poor decisions that groups are prone to make under certain conditions. An important follow-up question is: What group processes make for smarter decision making? Anita Woolley and Thomas Malone have been seeking answers to this very question. In one early study in their research program, small groups of students completed a variety of well-tested decision-making tasks (Woolley et al., 2010). The groups reasoned together through practical intelligence tasks, such as identifying what five things a person would need to survive alone in the desert. They tackled tasks requiring logical reasoning. They engaged in open-ended brainstorming. Each group’s scores on these tasks were tallied to yield a score of the group’s collective intelligence.

What dynamics raised a group’s collective intelligence? One hypothesis might be that it just takes one really smart person to lift the intelligence of a group’s decision making. This proved not to be the case. How well each individual did on decision-making tasks prior to the study had no influence on their group’ s performance. Instead, groups that had more empathic individuals, as assessed in an emotion-recognition task conducted prior to the study, and that practiced effective turn-taking in their deliberations, where each member had the chance to voice ideas freely, scored higher on collective intelligence. Groups led by one domineering person prone to monologues and decrees proved to be less intelligent. And finally, as the proportion of women in the group rose, so, too, did the team’ s performance, presumably because women are more likely to engage in social behaviors—empathic listening, effective turn-taking, more open-ended discussion—that promote collective intelligence. These findings have been replicated in 20 different studies of more than 1,500 groups (Riedl et al., 2021).

This research on collective intelligence has important lessons for the increasing diversity of groups in workplaces today. Greater diversity in the workplace can lead to more innovative and creative work, but it also poses many challenges, including reduced trust, attraction, communication, and commitment to the group (Roberge & van Dick, 2010). Given these challenges, Marie-Élène Roberge and Rolf van Dick argue that for more diverse groups to achieve the greater creativity and innovation that diversity can bring, those groups will need to practice different forms of social intelligence, such as empathy, self-disclosure, and clear and open communication.

Group Polarization

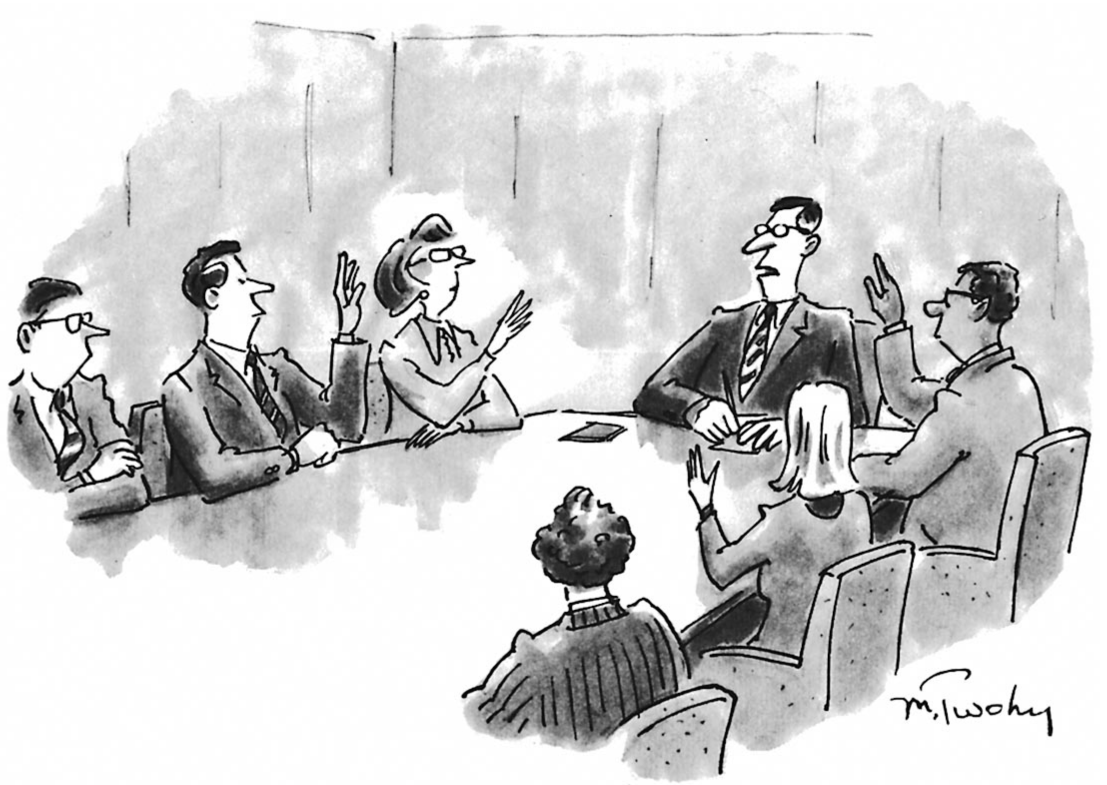
Today’s headlines of acrimonious elections, gridlock in Congress, the culture wars over immigration and abortion, and protests over critical race theory and gender inclusivity in schools around the country suggest that we are living in a time of division and discord. Might basic group processes have something to do with the social divisions we are experiencing? One contributor to such social divisions is group polarization, whereby group decisions tend to be more extreme than those made by individuals. Whatever way the majority of individuals in a group are leaning, group discussion tends to make them lean even further in that direction (Esteban & Schneider, 2008; Myers & Bishop, 1971; Zuber, Crott, & Werner, 1992).

In one study, for example, French students expressed their opinions about President Charles de Gaulle (a French general during World War II) and about Americans, first individually and then again after having discussed the topics in groups. The results? Their initially positive sentiments toward de Gaulle became even more positive, and their initially negative sentiments toward Americans became even more negative (Moscovici & Zavalloni, 1969). It appears that we are more likely to hear “ugly American” from a group of non-Americans than from a sample of individuals asked separately about their views of Americans.

Why does group discussion lead group members to take more extreme positions? And why is it that individuals move the group in one direction or the other rather than simply conforming to the group average? Research indicates that two causes work in concert to produce group polarization. One involves the persuasiveness of the information brought up during group discussion; the other involves people’s tendency to try to claim the “right” position among the various opinions within the group. Let’s consider each explanation in turn.

THE “PERSUASIVE ARGUMENTS” ACCOUNT When deciding on a course of action, people consider the merits of different arguments. It stands to reason that when people are predisposed to favor one course of action in a given situation, they can think of more and better arguments for that action. Of course, any one person in the group is unlikely to think of *all* the arguments in favor of one alternative or the other, so when the issue is discussed by the group, each person is likely to be exposed to new arguments. This expanded pool of arguments, in turn, is likely to be skewed in favor of the action the people are predisposed to.

Group discussion, then, tends to expose the group members to even more arguments in favor of the position that the average person was already inclined to take. This exposure serves to strengthen those initial inclinations, and group polarization happens. This explanation suggests that personal, face-to-face discussion is not necessary to produce group polarization. All that’s needed is exposure to the pool of arguments that true group discussion tends to elicit. Several studies have tested this idea by having participants read the arguments of other group members in private so that they are exposed to the arguments without knowing who in the group might have advanced them. In support of the persuasive arguments interpretation, these studies have shown that reading others’ arguments is indeed sufficient to produce group polarization (Burnstein, Vinokur, & Trope, 1973).



“It’s agreed, then, that we move forward on the philodendron.”

THE “SOCIAL COMPARISON” INTERPRETATION Another process that encourages group polarization is the very human tendency to compare ourselves with others. “Am I as smart as most people here?” “Do my neighbors all drive better cars than I do?” “Am I getting as much out of life as everyone else?” Consider how these sorts of comparisons might lead to group polarization. For example, when evaluating an issue for which people are inclined to take risks (for example, a career choice early in life), people are likely to think they’re more tolerant of risk than the average person. In this case, riskiness is valued, and people like to think of themselves as having more than an average amount of a valued trait. However, when considering an issue that calls for caution (investing money that belongs to a beloved relative), most people are likely to think they are more prudent or risk averse than the average person. People tend to think, in other words, that they are farther out on the correct side of the opinion distribution on most issues.

What happens when all group members are inclined to make the same choice—say, a risky choice—and are also inclined to think of themselves as more likely than average to take risks? Many people will find that their tolerance of risk is closer to average than they thought—perhaps even below average. This realization leads some individuals to attempt to show that they are in fact more risk tolerant than average. The group as a whole, then, becomes a bit riskier on those issues for which a somewhat risky approach initially seemed warranted. Similarly, the group would become a bit more conservative on those issues for which a somewhat cautious approach seemed warranted. In other words, the desire to distinguish oneself from others by expressing a more extreme opinion in the “right” direction leads predictably to the group polarization effect. As one journalist put it, “People are always trying to outdo one another; if everyone in a group agrees that men are jerks, then someone in the group is bound to argue that they’re assholes” (Kolbert, 2009, p. 112).

A CLOSER LOOK

RISK TAKERS The value placed on risk taking is reflected in the widespread admiration of bold entrepreneurs who took big chances and ended up reshaping entire industries. Vera Wang altered the landscape of bridal fashion and Steve Jobs transformed the world of computers, music, and communications.

To test the social comparison interpretation, researchers do just the opposite of the approach used to test the persuasive arguments account: They expose group members to everyone else’ s positions without conveying the content of any of the arguments or reasons underlying those positions. As predicted, in one such experiment, the group polarization effect was observed (Teger & Pruitt, 1967), but it was weaker than would be expected if both persuasive arguments and social comparison were contributing to the effect.

A CLOSER LOOK

Taking It to Extremes: Politics and Group Polarization

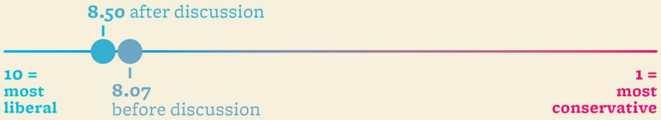
Group polarization, the tendency for group members to embrace more extreme positions after discussing an issue, can be intensified when the group consists largely of like-minded individuals. Such was the focus of a study on conservative versus liberal political views in the United States. The results showed clear-cut group polarization: After deliberating with ideologically similar others, liberals became even more liberal, and conservatives became even more conservative. Moreover, the political beliefs within each group became increasingly similar.

Polarization on Hot-Button Issues

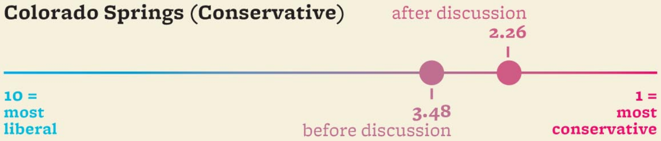
In this study, residents of relatively liberal Boulder, Colorado, and relatively conservative Colorado Springs had 15-minute discussions about climate change, affirmative action, and same-sex civil unions with people from their own community. Before and after the discussions, participants rated their views on the topics on a 1–10 scale. The graph shows participants' average ratings for the three topics.

Overall Polarization Among Groups

Boulder (Liberal)

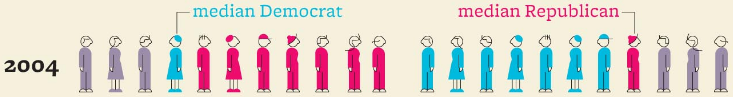


Colorado Springs (Conservative)



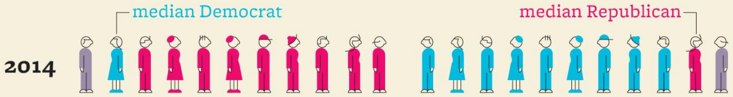
Polarization of U.S. Political Views

Group polarization has broader implications for the political climate. As people seek out homogeneous social environments, they are increasingly exposed only to views that resemble their own, which pushes their views further toward the extremes.



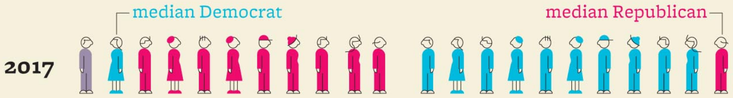
70% of Republicans were **more conservative** than the median Democrat.

68% of Democrats were **more liberal** than the median Republican.



92% of Republicans were **more conservative** than the median Democrat.

94% of Democrats were **more liberal** than the median Republican.



95% of Republicans were **more conservative** than the median Democrat.

97% of Democrats were **more liberal** than the median Republican.

FOR CRITICAL THINKING

1. Elaborate on the findings of the group polarization study using what you have learned about confirmation bias, conformity, and social identity theory.
2. What are some implications of group polarization in contexts such as courtroom juries, hiring committees, and university classrooms and departments?

Sources: Colorado study: Schkade, Sunstein, & Hastie, 2007; U.S. political view: Pew Research Center, 2017.

LOOKING BACK

Groupthink can lead to defective decision making as people in highly cohesive groups censor their reservations, reject alternative viewpoints, and succumb to group pressures. To avoid this problem, the group should encourage the airing of all viewpoints, leaders should refrain from stating their opinions at the outset, and someone should be designated to play devil’s advocate. Group decision making can also lead to group polarization, in which the force of persuasive arguments and social comparison leads group decisions to be more extreme than decisions made by individuals.

Glossary

groupthink

Faulty thinking by members of highly cohesive groups in which the critical scrutiny that should be devoted to the issues at hand is subverted by social pressures to reach consensus.

self-censorship
Withholding information or opinions in group discussions.

group polarization
The tendency for group decisions to be more extreme than those made by individuals; whatever way the group as a whole is leaning, group discussion tends to make it lean further in that direction.

Power and Social Hierarchy

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Define power.
- Identify the virtue-based and vice-based approaches to gaining power.
- Describe the approach/inhibition theory of power and explain how power influences both cognition and action.

With Nazism rising in Europe in the 1930s, the British philosopher Bertrand Russell observed, “The laws of social dynamics are laws which can only be stated in terms of power.” For this great thinker, so much of group life, from feeling popular in high school to rising in the ranks at work, is shaped by power.

In the broader sense, Russell is right. History’s ebbs and flows center on struggles between groups over power—over the right to vote, for example, or the choice to have an abortion, or vaccine mandates during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the past 50 years, we have seen dramatic changes in power, as women have risen in power at work and in the government, billions of people have been lifted out of poverty, and new economic superpowers—China and India—have emerged. Power is dynamic and always changing.

What do we mean by power? Economists have long studied power in terms of access to financial capital or wealth. For political scientists, power is about participating in and controlling the process of voting and governing, and it increasingly depends on the representation of political events in the media. For historians, the trajectories of nations have been shaped by the power of knowledge and technology, particularly in the realm of warfare.

For psychologists interested in an individual’ s place, or influence, within a group, power refers to the ability to control one’ s own outcomes and those of others (S. T. Fiske, 1993). In this sense, power is about a person’ s capacity to influence (Keltner et al., 2008). You might wield power in a group, for example, by influencing others’ beliefs, by assisting them in class to improve their grades, by enhancing their job prospects or wealth, or even by altering their emotions, such as by providing calm during a period of high stress.

Power by its very nature is relational: It is about one’ s relative capacity to influence others, whether friends, parents, work colleagues, romantic partners, or neighbors. An individual’ s sense of power, then, varies from one relationship to another, from one group to another, and from one social context to another (C. Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012). You might feel you have a great deal of influence in the restaurant where you work, for instance, but little influence on the dorm hall.

Within a group, the relational nature of power manifests in a social hierarchy: an arrangement of individuals in terms of their rank, or power, relative to the power of other group members. Within hierarchies, some individuals enjoy elevated power and others less power. Studies find that people fold into social hierarchies surprisingly quickly in just about any kind of group—for example, at summer camps, in college dorms, on college sports teams, in workplaces, and in fraternities and sororities (C. Anderson et al., 2001; Savin-Williams, 1977). Why? Because social hierarchies help solve problems of group living (C. Anderson & Brown, 2010). A social hierarchy provides rules for dividing up resources that, although often unfair (those on top get more), can dampen or avert the strife that accompanies the allocation of resources. Group decision making can sometimes be unmanageably complex, and hierarchies provide a shared notion of how decisions are made.

Given how pervasive power is, and how much it defines an individual’s life in groups of different kinds, let’s consider social psychology’s answer to two questions: How do we gain power in groups? And once we have power, how does the experience of power shape our thought and action?

Gaining Power

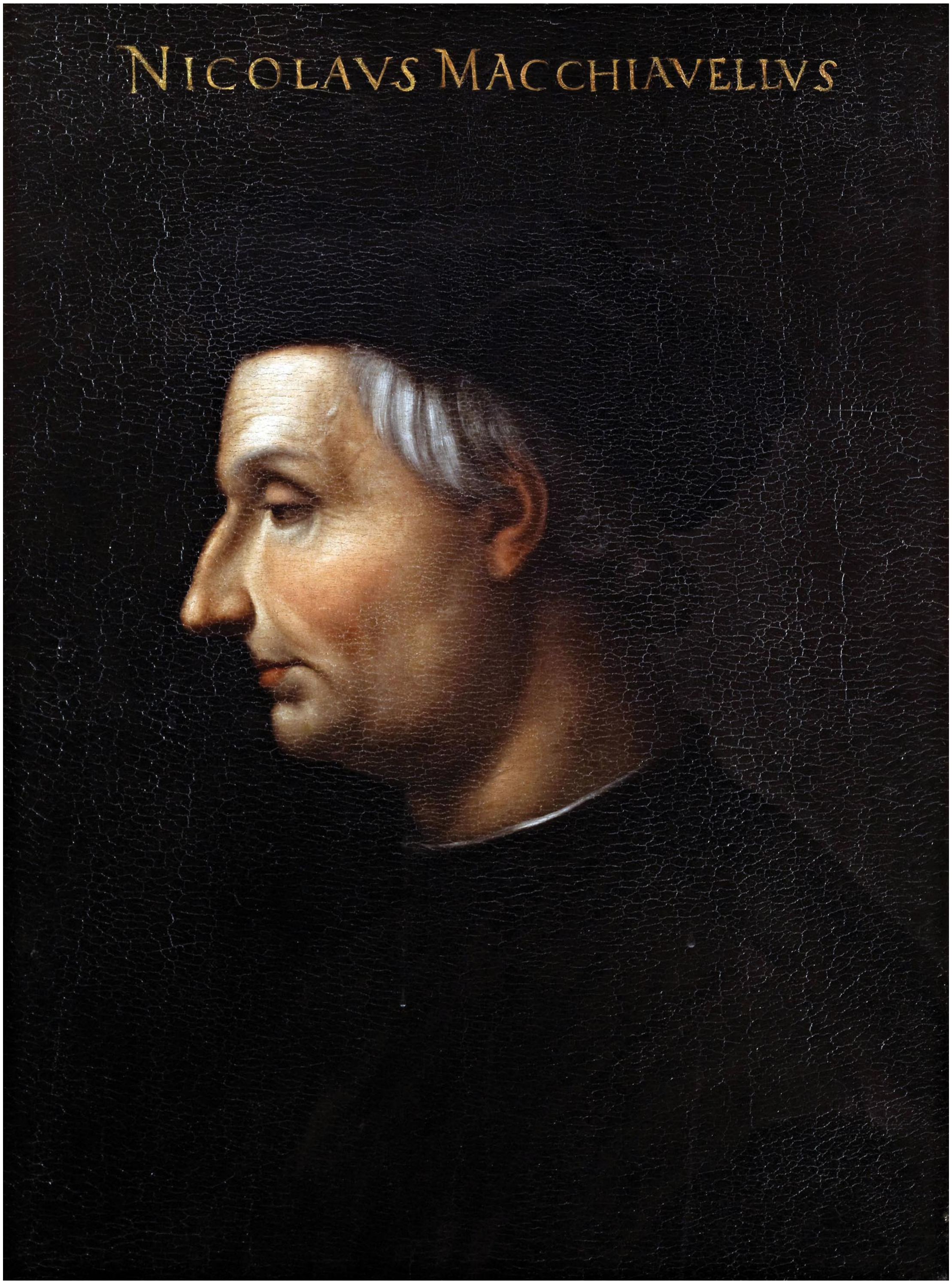
As you move through your career, how will you rise to positions of greater influence? If you raise children, how would you advise them to succeed in the world? Be fair? Bold? Courageous? Or take no prisoners and look out for Number One (namely, themselves!)? On balance, it is beneficial for people to feel that they have power, or influence in the world. People who feel more power over their lives tend to enjoy greater happiness, feel greater agency, experience less stress, and enjoy more robust physical health (C. Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Keltner, 2016). So, what’s the secret to gaining power?

Recently, social psychologists Joey Cheng and Leanne ten Brinke have identified two pathways to gaining power within groups (C. Boehm, 1999; Cheng et al., 2013; ten Brinke & Keltner, 2022). The first we will call the path of *virtue*. The thinking behind this path, which dates back to scholars such as Aristotle and Confucius, is that when individuals do things that are good for the group—for example, generating bold new ideas, sharing knowledge, or giving time to others—group members, in their own self-interest, will recognize these contributions and give such individuals more power (Aristotle, trans. 1962). **Table 12.2** defines four virtues that should enable an individual to gain power within groups: courage, humanity, justice, and temperance.

TABLE 12.2 VIRTUES AND VICES

Virtues	**Characteristics**
Courage	Bravery, persistence, honesty
Humanity	Kindness, sympathy, love
Justice	Teamwork, fairness
Temperance	Modesty, humility, prudence, forgiveness
Vices	
Machiavellianism	Manipulativeness, deception, dominance
Narcissism	Entitlement, superiority, grandiosity
Psychopathy	Lack of empathy, impulsivity, aggressiveness

A second path to power is through *vice*, and Table 12.2 also lists three “vices,” known as the dark triad, that have attracted the attention of social psychologists: Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. This path to power makes for great literature and television, as is evident in the success of shows like *House of Cards*, *Billions*, and *Succession*. The thinking behind the vice path is largely based on the writings of Niccolò Machiavelli. In his book *The Prince*, published in 1532, Machiavelli argued that we gain and keep power thanks to actions that give us dominance over others, such as through force, fraud, manipulation, strategic violence, and the weakening of people around us (Machiavelli, 1532/2003).


NICOLAVS MACCHIAVELLVS

LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS Influential Italian statesman Niccolò Machiavelli.

Which strategy prevails? It depends, like so many things, on the context. For example, research in organizations finds that individuals committed to enhancing the welfare of others, thus practicing the virtues of humanity, justice, and temperance, gain social influence and the respect of their peers (T. R. Cohen et al., 2014). In a similar fashion, those with a strong sense of responsibility for others are perceived as highly capable leaders (Schaumberg & Flynn, 2012). At the same time, individuals who report high levels of the vices listed in Table 12.2 show an eagerness to ascend to positions of power (Babiak, Neumann, & Hare, 2010). Studies find that people high in the vice of psychopathy use charisma and charm to attain management roles despite poor performance reviews, and they tend to engage in more Machiavellian behaviors, such as bullying, at work (Mathieu et al., 2014).

Ten Brinke and her colleagues took a novel approach to testing the virtue and vice hypotheses about gaining power (ten Brinke et al., 2016; ten Brinke, Kish, & Keltner, 2018). Relying on archival videos of speeches by U.S. senators and interviews with hedge fund managers (who take notoriously risky approaches to investing people’s money in the stock market), they coded for verbal and nonverbal signs of virtues and vices. For example, for the virtue of humanity, the researchers coded for signs of sympathy in the speaker’s tone of voice; for the virtue of justice, righteous signs of anger in the speaker’s words and facial expressions (see Chapter 5); for the virtue of temperance, nonverbal signs of modesty, such as the head oriented downward and a polite smile. In terms of vices, the researchers coded for domineering posture (a sign of Machiavellian coerciveness), a lack of emotional expression (a sign of psychopathy), and uses of the words “I” and “me” (telltale signs of narcissism). The researchers found that senators who showed evidence of virtue in their speeches were more often able to convince other senators to sign on to the bills they were promoting, whereas senators who showed more vice-based tendencies did not have such influence. With respect to success on Wall Street, hedge fund managers who showed more evidence of virtues and less evidence of vices in their interviews earned greater economic returns for their clients. Perhaps it does pay to be good after all.

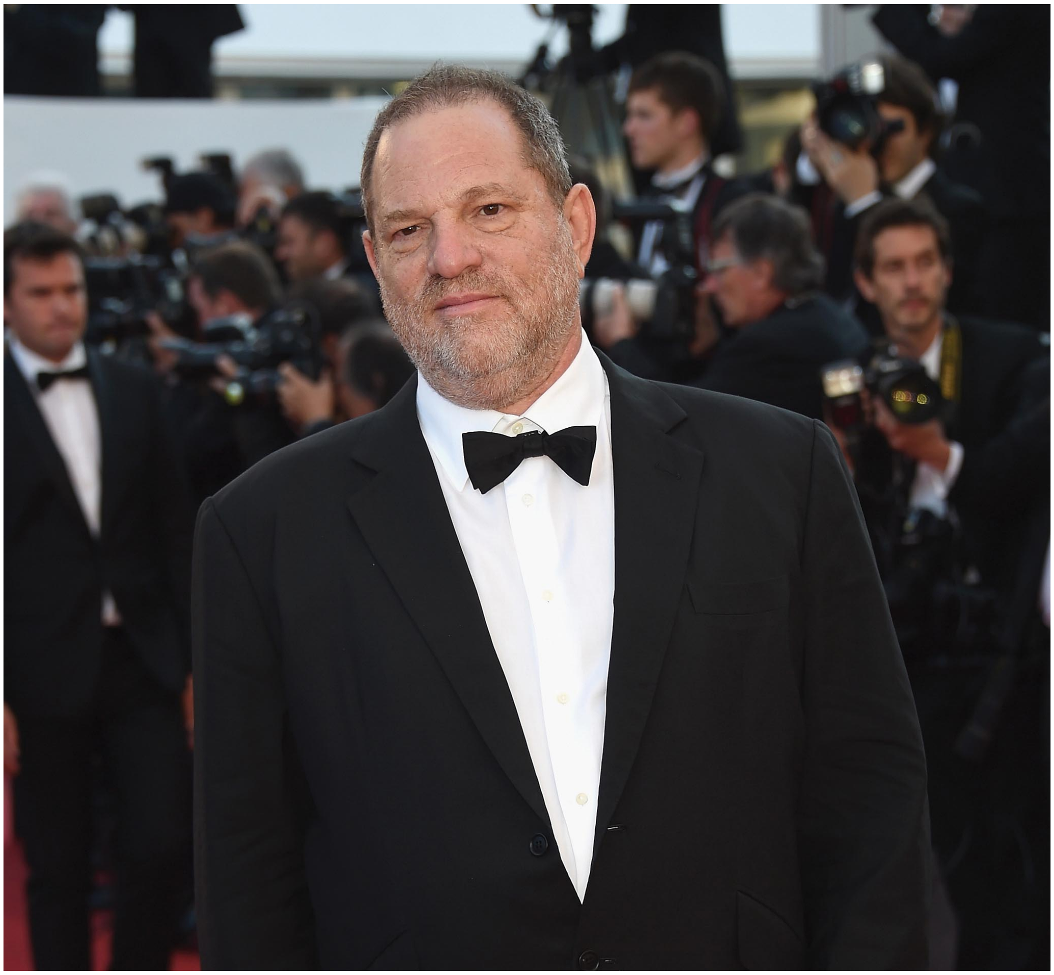
POWER AND INTIMIDATION High-power people often feel less constrained by social rules about appropriate behavior than people of lower rank do. President Lyndon Johnson

> approaches Senator Theodore Green more closely than is generally socially acceptable, touches his arm, and leans in close to his face as he seeks to intimidate him into voting the way Johnson wants him to.

How Power Shapes Thought and Action

Many chapters of human history have been defined by astonishing abuses of power, such as the horrifying genocides perpetrated by Hitler, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Pol Pot, Idi Amin, Saddam Hussein, Bashar al-Assad, and Vladimir Putin. This side of power is reflected in such well-known sayings as “Power corrupts” and “Money [a source of power] is the root of all evil.” And it begs for an explanation from social psychology.

The approach/inhibition theory of power offers one explanation of why having power can lead to its abuse (Cho & Keltner, 2020; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). If power involves the freedom to act as one wishes, when people experience elevated power, they should show *approach* behavior—that is, they tend to be less concerned about the evaluations of others and more inclined to act in goal-driven ways (Guinote, 2007, 2017; Guinote & Chen, 2018). In contrast, reduced power is associated with increased dependence on others. As a result, less powerful people should show *inhibition* behavior—that is, they tend to be more vigilant and careful in making judgments and decisions and more restrained when taking action. In effect, power gives people the green light to pursue their personal goals and desires. Reduced power is more like a yellow light: Caution is in order.



Reilly
FACTOR
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the
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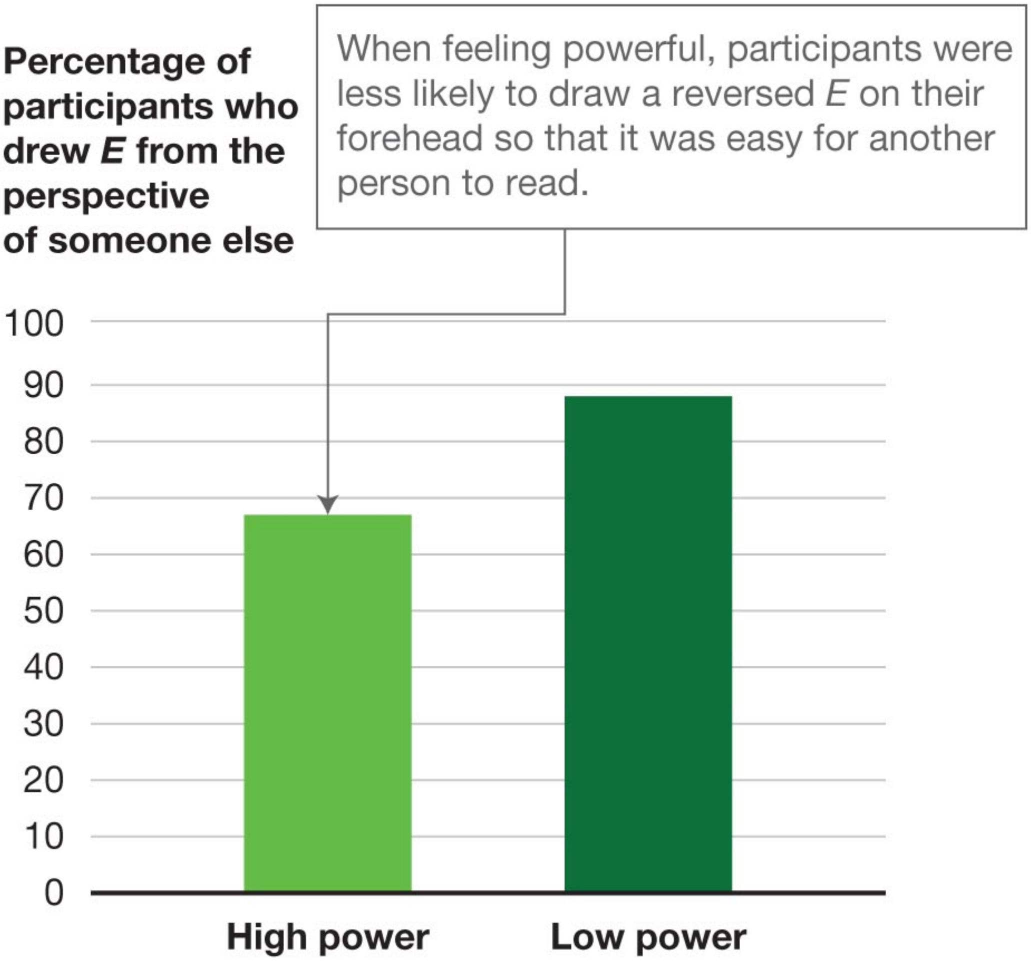
ABUSES OF POWER As the approach/inhibition theory of power maintains, being in a position of power can lead people, such as the powerful men shown here (clockwise from top left, film producer Harvey Weinstein, Fox News host Bill O' Reilly, former talk show host and television journalist Charlie Rose, and the late Fox News Chairman and CEO Roger Ailes), to ignore many of the usual constraints on behavior and to act in ways that satisfy their desires.

POWER AND EMPATHY FAILURES One core prediction of approach/inhibition theory concerns how power influences social cognition. High-power individuals, inclined to go after their own goals, should be less careful and systematic in their thoughts about others (Brauer et al., 2004). Consistent with this hypothesis, high-power individuals are more likely to stereotype others than to carefully attend to individuating information about them (S. T. Fiske, 2010). High-power people are also less accurate judges of others’ emotions (Gonzaga, Keltner, & Ward, 2008; Monroy, Cowen, & Keltner, 2022).

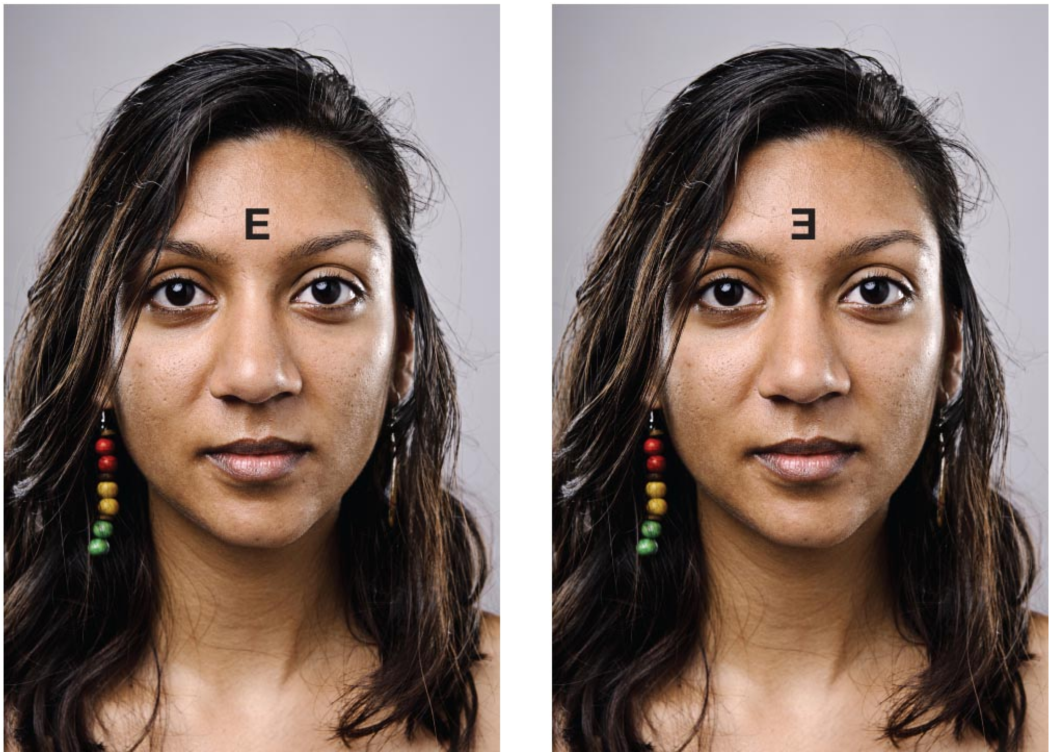
> “Power is like drinking gin on an empty stomach. You feel dizzy, you get drunk, you lose your balance.”
>
> —POPE FRANCIS

> “Power is the ultimate aphrodisiac.”
>
> —HENRY KISSINGER

Work by Adam Galinsky and his colleagues (2006) suggests that because those with elevated power are less careful in their judgments of others, they often fail to respond empathically to others. These investigators first induced people to feel relatively powerful or powerless by having them recall a time when they exerted control over another person or when someone else exerted control over them. Participants then performed a simple perspective-taking task: drawing the letter *E* on their forehead so that someone sitting across from them could read it. This task requires the participant to take the other person’s perspective and draw the *E* in reverse.


Percentage of participants who drew *E* from the perspective of someone else
When feeling powerful, participants were less likely to draw a reversed *E* on their forehead so that it was easy for another person to read.
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
High power
Low power

(A)



(B)

FIGURE 12.5 **POWER AND EMPATHY FAILURES** This study showed how power diminishes one's capacity to consider the perspectives of others. Source: Galinsky et al., 2006.

As you can see in **Figure 12.5**, participants feeling a surge of power were much less likely to draw the *E* in a way that took the other person's perspective into account. A recent review found that on different kinds of tasks, power reduces one's ability to take the perspective of others (Galinsky, Rucker, & Magee, 2016).

The empathy deficits produced by power can lead to pernicious consequences. Theresa Vescio and her colleagues have found that powerful men who stereotype female employees by focusing exclusively on their weaknesses tend to grant female employees fewer resources, evaluate them more negatively, and anticipate less success from female employees than from male employees (Vescio et al., 2005; Vescio, Snyder, & Butz, 2003). In a similar vein, feeling powerful leads prejudiced White people to focus to a greater extent on the weaknesses of Black employees relative to other employees (Vescio et al., 2006).

Additionally, Nathaniel Fast and his colleagues have found that power’s influence on social cognition includes shifts in our sense of self (Fast et al., 2012). People become overconfident when they recall a time of having power or are given power over another person within an experiment. They overestimate the accuracy of their knowledge, and they overestimate the likelihood of the success of their actions, even when such appraisals prove costly to themselves.

> “The fundamental concept in social science is Power, in the same sense in which Energy is the fundamental concept in physics. . . . The laws of social dynamics are laws which can only be stated in terms of power.”
>
> —BERTRAND RUSSELL

These findings may converge with your own observations that powerful individuals often appear somewhat out of touch, whereas the powerless seem more clued in. But are there costs to the heightened vigilance of having less power? There are indeed. Feeling less powerful makes people less flexible in their thinking (P. K. Smith & Trope, 2006). For example, Pamela Smith and her colleagues induced people to feel elevated power or diminished power by priming them with low- or high-power words (*obey*, *dominate*) or having them recall an experience of low or high power (P. K. Smith et al., 2008). Participants then worked on a variety of cognitive tasks. In one task, words were flashed one at a time on a computer screen, and participants indicated whether a current word on the screen matched the word presented two trials earlier.

Performance on tasks like these requires cognitive flexibility and control. As predicted, participants randomly assigned to feel relatively powerless proved less effective in performing these cognitive tasks.

POWER AND DISINHIBITED BEHAVIOR A second core prediction of approach/inhibition theory concerns how power influences behavior. When feeling powerful, we feel freer to act on our goals and desires. Take sex, for example. Do you think it’s mainly CEOs, politicians, and rock stars who exhibit sexually inappropriate behavior? Think again. Social psychologists have found that just giving people the faintest whiff of power—for example, by having them recall an experience when they had power or having them read power-related words (priming them with ideas of power)—can lead them to touch others and approach them closely, to overestimate another’s sexual interest in them, and to flirt in an overly forward fashion (Kunstman & Maner, 2011; Rudman & Borgida, 1995). In one survey of 1,261 employees, the higher an individual’s rank in the organization, the more likely that person was to have extramarital affairs (Lammers, Stapel, & Galinsky, 2010). Power differences are almost always involved when men sexually harass women (and less typically men) at work with patterns of inappropriate comments, sexually forward behaviors, and coercion and threat (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008). Power would indeed appear to be the ultimate aphrodisiac—but mainly for the person feeling powerful.

Just as unsettling are studies showing that elevated power is associated with increased unethical and immoral behavior. At work, more powerful individuals are more likely to interrupt and swear at others (Pearson & Porath, 1999). Wealthy White teenagers are more likely to shoplift than poorer students of color are (Blanco et al., 2008). In a survey of people from more than 27 cultures, the wealthy disapproved the least of unethical behaviors, such as cheating on taxes or taking resources home from work against company policy (Wang & Murnighan, 2014). Power even leads to unethical and dangerous driving. Paul Piff and his colleagues had a confederate stand at the edge of a marked crosswalk on a busy street abutting a university campus in California (Piff et al., 2012). Piff and colleagues kept track of which cars stopped for the pedestrian (adhering to a California law) and which did not, noting the status of the car on a 5-point scale. As you can see in **Figure 12.6**, drivers of the fancy cars stopped 46.2 percent of the time; drivers of the lowest-status cars always obeyed the law.

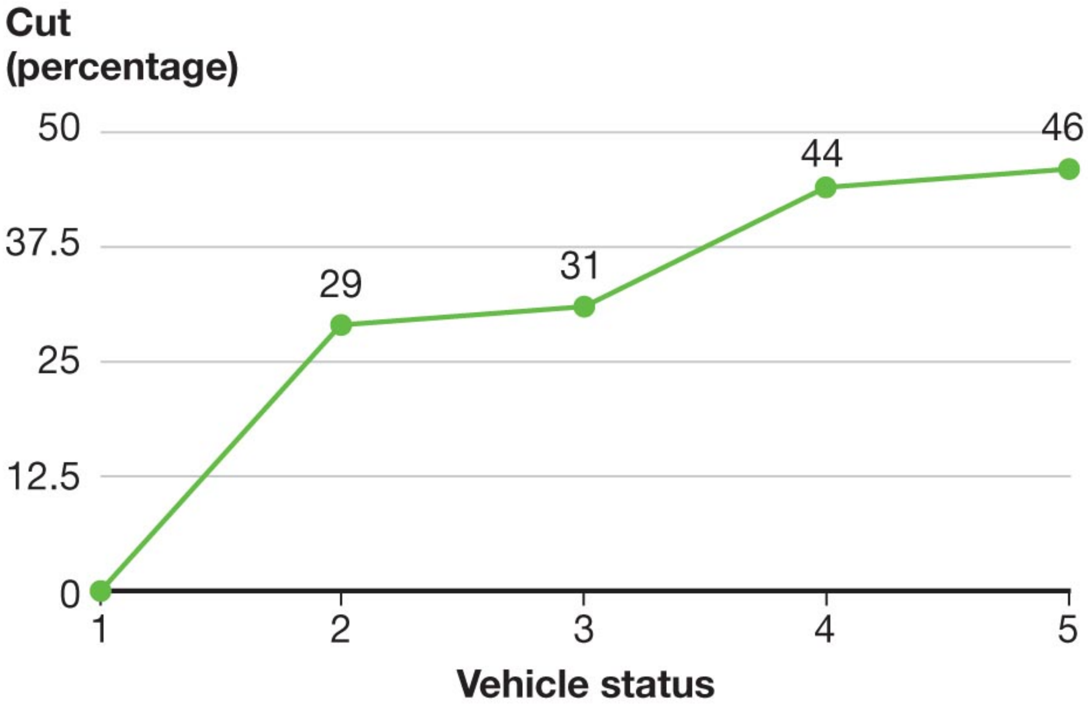
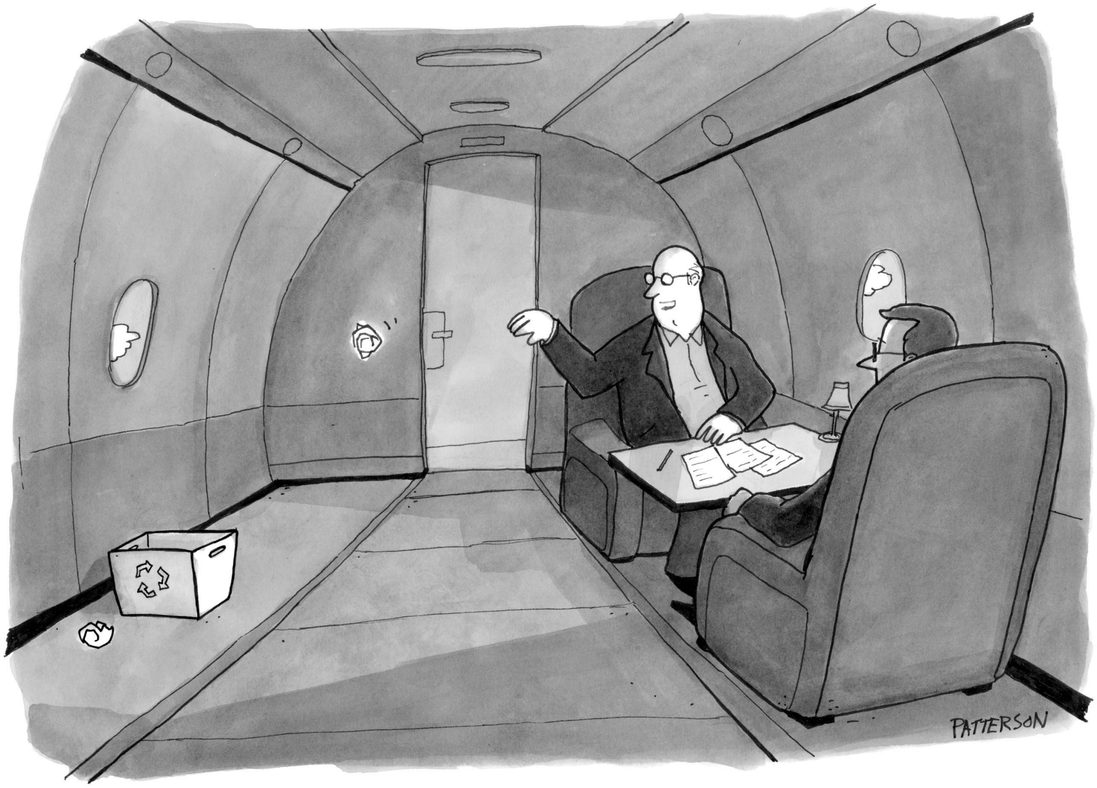


FIGURE 12.6 **POWER AND UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR** Power can lead to more impulsive behavior, as in this study where driving a fancy car led drivers to be more likely to cut illegally in front of a pedestrian. Source: Piff et al., 2012.



"I try to do my part."

Bear in mind that the consistent effect of power is that it disinhibits. As the presidential biographer Robert Caro observed, "Power reveals." Power encourages us to express our underlying inclinations, both good (or virtue-based) and bad (vice-based). In one study that illustrates this idea, Serena Chen and her colleagues preselected participants who were either self-interested and exchange oriented or more compassionate and communally oriented (S. Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001). Each participant was then randomly assigned to a high-power or low-power position in a subtle manner: High-power participants were seated in a snazzy leather professorial chair during the experiment, and low-power people were seated in a plain chair. Participants then completed a long questionnaire for another participant, who was running late. Consistent with the idea that power amplifies the expression of preexisting tendencies, the high-power, communally oriented participants performed most of the task.

In contrast, the more self-interested participants with high power acted in a more self-serving fashion, leaving more of the task for the other participant to complete (see also Gordon & Chen, 2013). The same difference was not found between low-power communally oriented and exchange-oriented participants. The effects of power, then, depend on who holds it. Power corrupts the corruptible.

> “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power.”
>
> —ABRAHAM LINCOLN

LOOKING BACK

Power is an individual’s capacity to influence others within groups. Groups are defined in part by social hierarchies, which arrange individuals into different levels of power. Gaining power can be accomplished through two different pathways, one based in the practice of virtues, such as courage, justice, and humanity, and the other rooted in vice-based tendencies, such as Machiavellianism and narcissism. According to approach/inhibition theory, power can cause people to be less careful in their judgments of others, leading to more stereotyping, empathy failures, and impulsive behavior.

Glossary

power

The ability to control one’s own outcomes and those of others.

social hierarchy

The arrangement of individuals within a group in terms of their relative power.

approach/inhibition theory

A theory maintaining that high-power individuals are inclined to go after their goals and make quick (sometimes rash) judgments, whereas low-power individuals are more likely to constrain their behavior and pay careful attention to others.

Deindividuation and the Psychology of Mobs

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe the three properties of the deindividuated state.
- List two core conditions that give rise to deindividuation and provide an example of each.

On January 6, 2021, thousands of supporters of former president Donald Trump gathered near the White House to hear him speak about what they believed to be a stolen election. They had been inspired by earlier tweets of his, such as “Big Protest in D.C. on January 6th . . . Be there, be wild.” It was a mixed crowd that included members of far-right fringe groups and more moderate Trump voters. They waved flags and listened to the outgoing president’s speech, in which he told the crowd that “if you don’t fight like hell, you’re not going to have a country anymore.” The crowd then began to chant “Take the Capitol,” “Storm the Capitol,” and “Fight for Trump.” Before Trump finished his speech, the crowd began walking to the U.S. Capitol.

What would ensue was a harrowing insurrection, considered by many to be the gravest threat to democracy in the history of the United States. Thousands of Trump supporters, many of them armed, fought through police lines, smashed windows, and stormed into the Capitol. They marched through the building, where the electoral votes were being finalized, and shut down the vote-counting process. Protesters assaulted Capitol police with flag poles, lead pipes, and chemical agents; they destroyed journalists’ cameras, waved Confederate flags, and chanted, “Hang Mike Pence.” Once inside the Capitol building, the protesters vandalized and looted congressional offices, sat in senators’ chairs with their feet propped on senators’ desks, and called out “Nancy” (for Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi), with one rioter saying, “Tell Pelosi we’re coming for that b---h.” In the end, the protest led to six deaths and injuries to more than 150 Capitol police.

Subsequent investigations found that the January 6 insurrection was planned and organized by dozens of members of far-right groups like the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys. Online protest movements following the November 2020 election swelled in numbers, and angry protesters shared ideas and plans for occupying the Capitol, accompanied by images of assault weapons and names of politicians to target. The “Red State Secession” Facebook page shared addresses of “enemies,” including federal judges, and encouraged its 8,000 members to engage in acts of violence.

How can we account for the extreme behavior the nation witnessed that day? Members of various far-right groups were harboring grievances and had discussed taking action against the federal government for some time. But what about those who gathered for what they thought would be the sort of protest one sees all the time in the nation’s capital? How did they get caught up in the events? What made them transform from a group of protesters into an unruly mob?

(A)

(B)

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MOBS (A) Jake Angeli, a QAnon supporter known for his painted face and horned hat, roamed the Senate floor. (B) Tim Gionet (left), a neo-Nazi conspiracy theorist known as “Baked Alaska,” took over a Senate office. He is shown here with White supremacist leader Richard Spencer.

Deindividuation and the Group Mind

Across history, crowds like the one on January 6, 2021, at the U.S. Capitol have done dramatic things, from overthrowing monarchies and governments to perpetrating genocide against citizens of different religious beliefs. These events challenge us to understand how large groups of people can transform into unruly mobs. How do peaceful gatherings spin out of control and become violent? Why do law-abiding citizens, when immersed in a crowd, engage in acts of destruction they would never commit alone? How can we understand the psychology of “the mob”?

> “Whoever be the individuals that compose it, however like or unlike be their mode of life, . . . their character, or their intelligence, the fact that they have been transformed into a crowd puts them in possession of a sort of collective mind.”
>
> —GUSTAV LE BON

Social psychologists have addressed these questions in the context of examining the *emergent properties of groups*—behaviors that arise only when people are in groups. Indeed, people often say that a group has “a mind of its own.” As a result, the behavior of large groups of people is more than the sum of its individual members' tendencies. You might dance, sing, and play air guitar at a rock concert with all your friends, but you wouldn't likely do so if the band were playing a private concert just for you.

One of the first people to offer an extensive analysis of the psychology of the mob was nineteenth-century French sociologist Gustav Le Bon, who was inspired by the protests that led to the ousting of the last king of France. Le Bon thought that people lose their higher mental faculties of reason when in large groups: "By the mere fact that he forms part of an organized crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilization" (1895, p. 52). For Le Bon, this descent stems from the collection of individual, rational minds giving way to a less self-reflective "group mind."

EMERGENT PROPERTIES OF GROUPS Some behaviors surface only when people are part of a group and submerge their individual identities into the group. The people in this flash mob converged at this spot after receiving emails telling them when and where to gather. Their actions

> reflect the fact that they are in a group—behavior that would be highly unlikely if each of them was there alone.

Social psychologists have expanded on Le Bon’s ideas by examining how the thought patterns of individuals change when they come together in large groups and how these changes make them more susceptible to group influence. Most of the time, we feel individuated—that is, we feel individually identifiable by others, we consider ourselves individually responsible for our actions, and we are concerned with the propriety and future consequences of our behavior. But when we’re in a large group, we often experience a loss of individual identity—a sense of deindividuation (Diener, 1980; Zimbardo, 1970). In these circumstances, we sometimes feel “lost in the crowd,” caught up in what’s happening in the moment, with a diminished sense of responsibility for our actions.

A Model of Deindividuation

Philip Zimbardo (1970) proposed a theoretical model of deindividuation that specifies how certain conditions create the kind of psychological state that promotes the impulsive and often destructive behaviors observed in mobs (**Figure 12.7**). Perhaps the most important of these conditions are the anonymity individuals enjoy by blending in with a large group and the diffusion of responsibility that occurs when there are many people to share the blame. These conditions, along with the arousal, heightened activity, and sensory overload that often accompany being immersed in a large group, lead individuals to an internal state of deindividuation. The deindividuated state is characterized by diminished self-observation and self-evaluation and less concern for how others evaluate us.

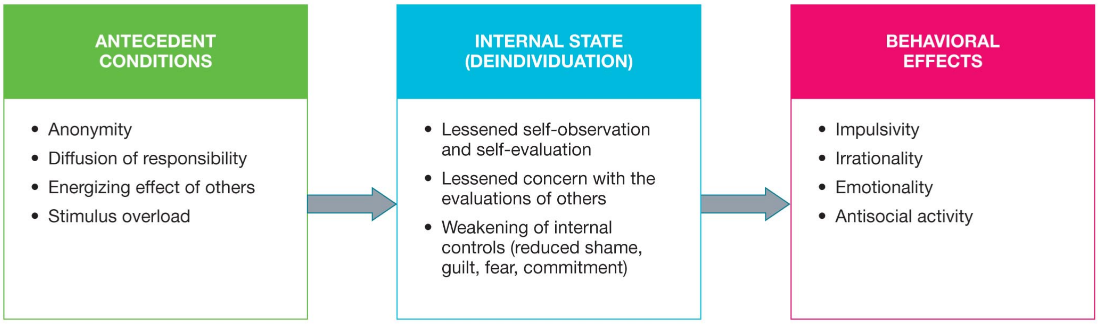

ANTECEDENT CONDITIONS
Anonymity
Diffusion of responsibility
Energizing effect of others
Stimulus overload
INTERNAL STATE (DEINDIVIDUATION)
Lessened self-observation and self-evaluation
Lessened concern with the evaluations of others
Weakening of internal controls (reduced shame, guilt, fear, commitment)
BEHAVIORAL EFFECTS
Impulsivity
Irrationality
Emotionality
Antisocial activity

FIGURE 12.7 **A THEORETICAL MODEL OF DEINDIVIDUATION** Certain conditions lead to an internal state of deindividuation, which in turn leads to impulsive behaviors that in other situations would be kept under control. Source: Adapted from Zimbardo, 1970.

Thus, a deindividuated person is less aware of the self, more focused on others and the immediate environment, and hence more responsive to behavioral cues from others—for good or for bad. Being in a deindividuated state lowers the threshold for engaging in actions that are typically inhibited. People are more likely to engage in impulsive behaviors both because there is more of a “push” to do so—resulting from increased arousal and the presence of many other impulsive people to imitate—and because the constraints that usually “pull” them back from such actions, such as a sense of personal evaluation and responsibility, are weakened.

DEINDIVIDUATION AND RIOTING When people are in a group and angry, they may let go of self-control and give in to impulses to wreak havoc. Normally law-abiding citizens merge into this crowd and break windows and smash cars with little thought to personal responsibility or the law.

What emerges is the kind of impulsive, irrational, and sometimes destructive behavior characteristic of mobs. This kind of behavior often creates its own momentum and is less responsive to stimuli that might, if a person were alone, bring it under control. Thus, Zimbardo’ s model of deindividuation is not an account of mob violence per se. Instead, it is a theoretical analysis of crowd-induced impulsive behavior that can turn violent (Spivey & Prentice-Dunn, 1990).

One implicit element of the model is that people often find the impulsivity that accompanies deindividuation to be liberating. Zimbardo argues that people go through much of their lives constrained by social norms. Living under such constraints can be tiresome and stifling, so people sometimes yearn to break free and act more impulsively. In support of this idea, Zimbardo notes that virtually all societies try to safely channel the expression of this yearning by scheduling occasions when people are encouraged to “let loose.” We see this in harvest rites in agrarian cultures, carnivals in religious societies, galas and festivals throughout history, and the raves and music festivals that are common today.

Testing the Model

The psychology of the mob and other emergent properties of groups are extremely difficult to study. It is logistically difficult to study groups of individuals, let alone crowds. This research also involves relatively few controlled experiments. People are on their best behavior when they enter a scientific laboratory and are disinclined to act impulsively and destructively. Also, there are ethical constraints against putting people in situations where aggressiveness and acts of destruction are likely. Therefore, some of the most informative research on the subject takes place out in the world and not in the lab (for exceptions, see Lea, Spears, & de Groot, 2001; Postmes & Spears, 1998). Such studies often involve the examination of archives—data originally gathered with no thought to its relevance to deindividuation. Investigators use these records to test hypotheses about predicted correlations between various antecedent conditions and resultant behaviors.

Because these empirical tests are not controlled experiments, they don’t control for, or rule out, various alternative interpretations of the results. Indeed, you might think of explanations having nothing to do with deindividuation for some of the empirical results reported here. Perhaps the observed behavior is the result of individual differences: It could be that certain kinds of individuals gravitate to moblike contexts, and those people’s propensities and personalities are what give rise to the impulsive behavior. Or perhaps the observed behavior is actually more rational than appearances would suggest, the result of norms and values guiding the collective of individuals. Even so, it's important to ask whether any one alternative interpretation can account for *all* of the relevant findings. If each finding requires a *different* alternative explanation, but all fit the model of deindividuation, then we can feel relatively confident with the deindividuation account.

DEINDIVIDUATION AND IMPULSIVE BEHAVIOR Often at concerts, in the spirit of deindividuated joy, people will crowd surf over their fellow concertgoers.

THE CONDUCT OF WAR Wars have always been a part of what the English novelist and scientist C. P. Snow called the "long and gloomy history of man." The conduct of warfare, however, has varied enormously from culture to culture and epoch to epoch. For example, warfare practices vary in their ferocity. At the high end are beheadings, ritualistic torture, and the systematic slaughter of civilian noncombatants. At the very low end would be what Tom Wolfe (1979) has described as single-combat warfare: the David and Goliath battles in which the warring parties each select a single warrior to do battle with each other. The losing side pays a price in territory or some other form of wealth, but less damage is done to both groups.

Is the brutality of warfare related to deindividuation? The theory predicts that it should be: It should be easier for people to let go of the usual prohibitions against barbarity when they feel anonymous and unaccountable for their actions. To determine whether such a relationship exists, researchers investigated the warfare practices of 23 non-Western cultures (R. I. Watson, 1973). They examined each culture to see whether its warriors were deindividuated before battle (for example, by wearing masks or war paint) and how aggressively they waged war (whether they tortured the enemy, whether they fought to the death in all battles, and so on). As predicted, there was a strong correlation between deindividuation and aggressiveness in warfare. Among those cultures whose warriors changed their appearance before battle, 80 percent were deemed particularly aggressive; among those cultures whose warriors did not change their appearance, only 13 percent were deemed especially aggressive. When warriors are disguised in battle, they fight more ferociously. (On the other hand, the ancient Celts were in the habit of fighting naked, and they were ferocious fighters that the Romans were terrified to face. Of course, whether to consider nakedness an increase or a decrease in individuation isn’t clear.)

BOX 12.2

Not So Fast: **Critical Thinking About Correlated Trends**

If you look up statistics on the number of people regularly attending their church, temple, or mosque each year over the past quarter century and tally up annual instances of especially brutal episodes of violence (beheadings, suicide bombings, torture) over that same time span, you’ll observe a high correlation between the two. Why? Has increased religious fervor encouraged a dehumanization of religious outgroups? Or has exposure to gruesome images of this sort of violence led people to seek solace in religion?

Perhaps both are true, and by this point in the book we hope you’ve learned not to jump to any one conclusion on the basis of a simple correlation. But there’s another possibility: The two may have absolutely nothing to do with each other, and their correlation may reflect the basic fact that both religiosity and episodes of violence have increased over this time period. The number of people attending religious services has gone up simply because the world population has gone up. Beheadings and bombings have gone up for all sorts of geopolitical reasons. The broader point is that whenever *any* two variables have increased over time, there will be a substantial year-to-year correlation between them. Thus, if you look up the number of online searches for, say, Gal Gadot or Timothée Chalamet over the past five years and the number of searches for jihad (or the number of bombings for that matter), you’ll find a positive correlation between the two. Both have been going up during that time, so they *have* to be correlated.

Statisticians refer to any systematic increase or decrease over time as a *secular trend* (from the late Latin word for “age” or “span of time”), and the lesson here is that it’s important to be especially cautious about interpreting a significant correlation involving two such trends. Again, correlation does not equal causation. It may have no more meaning than the correlation between the yearly sales of salted caramel ice cream and legalized marijuana (both of which have been growing substantially in recent years).

WARFARE AND DEINDIVIDUATION Groups in which warriors deindividuate themselves before battle by wearing war paint and war masks tend to engage in more brutal warfare practices.

HALLOWEEN MAYHEM For Americans, one of the most familiar occasions for uninhibited and impulsive behavior is Halloween night. The destructive acts that occur on that holiday range from mild episodes of egg throwing to more serious hooliganism. One group of social psychologists took advantage of the Halloween atmosphere to conduct an ambitious test of the role of deindividuation in antisocial behavior (Diener et al., 1976). They set up research stations in 27 homes throughout the city of Seattle and monitored the behavior of more than 1,000 trick-or-treaters. At each participating house, an assistant of the experimenter told the children they could take one piece of candy from a large bowl sitting on a table in the entrance to the house. Next to the bowl of candy was a bowl filled with coins. The assistant then walked away and covertly monitored the children’s actions from afar. Would the children take just their allotted single piece of candy, or would they take more—and perhaps even some coins?

The investigators examined the influence of two variables connected to deindividuation. First, the children arrived either individually or in groups, and the investigators expected those in groups to feel more anonymous and therefore to be more likely to transgress. Second, the assistants purposely “individuated” a random sample of children arriving both alone and in groups. Before departing, they asked these children for their names and addresses and then repeated this information aloud for emphasis. Individuating the children—that is, identifying them by name so they would no longer feel anonymous—was predicted to inhibit any temptation to transgress.

As **Figure 12.8** shows, both variables had the anticipated effect. The children who arrived in groups were much more likely to transgress than those who were alone, regardless of whether they were anonymous or not. Children who were anonymous were much more likely to transgress than those who were individuated, regardless of whether they were alone or in groups. Putting these two findings together, the anonymous children trick-or-treating in groups were the most likely to transgress.

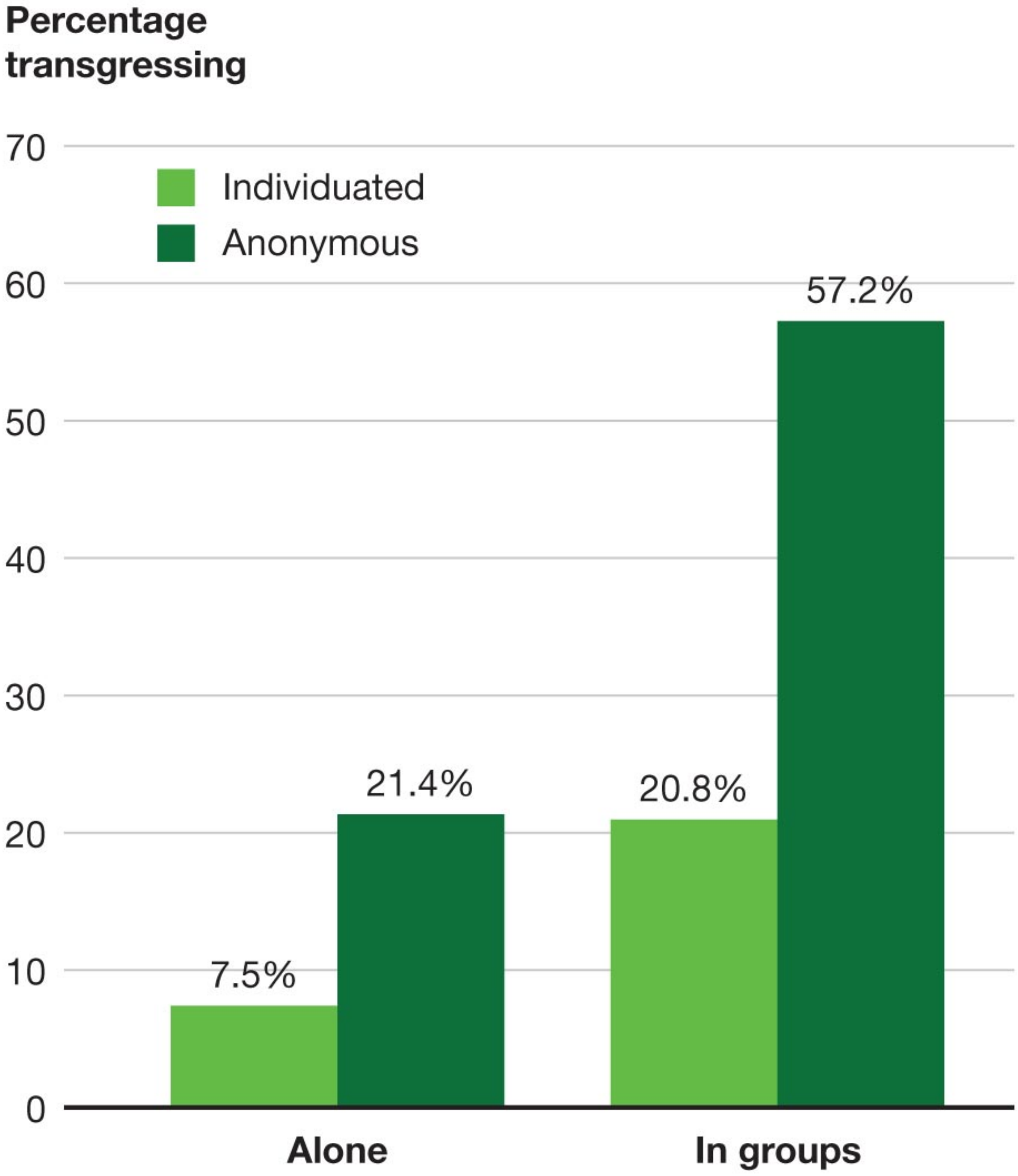


FIGURE 12.8 **DEINDIVIDUATION AND TRANSGRESSION** In this study, the percentage of trick-or-treaters who transgressed was affected by whether they had been asked to give their name (individuated condition) or not (anonymous condition) and whether they were alone or in a group. Source: Adapted from Diener et al., 1976.

Self-Awareness and Individuation

If “losing ourselves” in a crowd and becoming deindividuated makes us more likely to behave impulsively, it stands to reason that being especially self-aware and self-conscious would have the opposite effect. Anything that focuses attention on the self, such as being in front of a camera, seeing ourselves in a mirror, wearing a name tag, or knowing that our acts will be displayed by others on social media, may lead to individuation and make us particularly inclined to act carefully and in accordance with our sense of propriety. This is just what self-awareness theory predicts. When people focus their attention on themselves, they become more concerned with self-evaluation and how their current behavior conforms to their own standards and values (Duval & Wicklund, 1972).

INDIVIDUATION AND SELF-AWARENESS Anything that focuses attention on the self and individual identity is likely to lead to heightened concern for self-control and propriety. Name tags on these people at a business conference can encourage a sense of individuation and, most likely, restrained behavior.

STUDIES OF SELF-AWARENESS Many experiments have shown that people do indeed act in ways that are more consistent with their attitudes and values when they' ve been made self-conscious by being placed in front of a mirror or an attentive audience (Duval & Lalwani, 1999; Froming, Walker, & Lopyan, 1982; Scheier, Fenigstein, & Buss, 1974). In one study, researchers asked college students to solve a series of anagrams and told them to stop when a bell sounded. In a control condition, nearly three-quarters of them fudged a bit by continuing to work beyond the bell. But in a condition in which participants were made self-aware by working in front of a mirror, fewer than 10 percent cheated (Diener & Wallbom, 1976). Although most students *say* that cheating is a bad thing, it appears to take some self-awareness to get them to act on that belief. Note that because being in a state of self-awareness is the flip side of feeling deindividuated, any experiment that supports self-awareness theory also provides indirect support for the model of deindividuation.

A clever study in a work setting provides further evidence that self-awareness promotes behavior that is more in keeping with personal standards (Bateson, Nettle, & Roberts, 2006). In many offices, it’s common to have a regularly offered goody, be it coffee, snacks, or tea, with an “honest box” next to it, in which people donate to cover the cost of the refreshment. The trouble, though, is that people are prone to exploit such a public good by eating or drinking without contributing. In Melissa Bateson’s Department of Psychology at the University of Newcastle, the provision of milk for coffee ran according to such an honor system, and people contributed whatever they wanted for it. When Bateson and colleagues placed an image of flowers on a wall near the coffee dispenser, her work colleagues gave, on average, 15 pence for every liter of milk. But when an image of a person’s eyes stared at them as they contributed, prompting greater self-awareness, their donations jumped considerably, rising to 70 pence when the image was of a stern-looking man’s eyes. You can see the results in **Figure 12.9**. Self-awareness prompted more socially appropriate behavior.

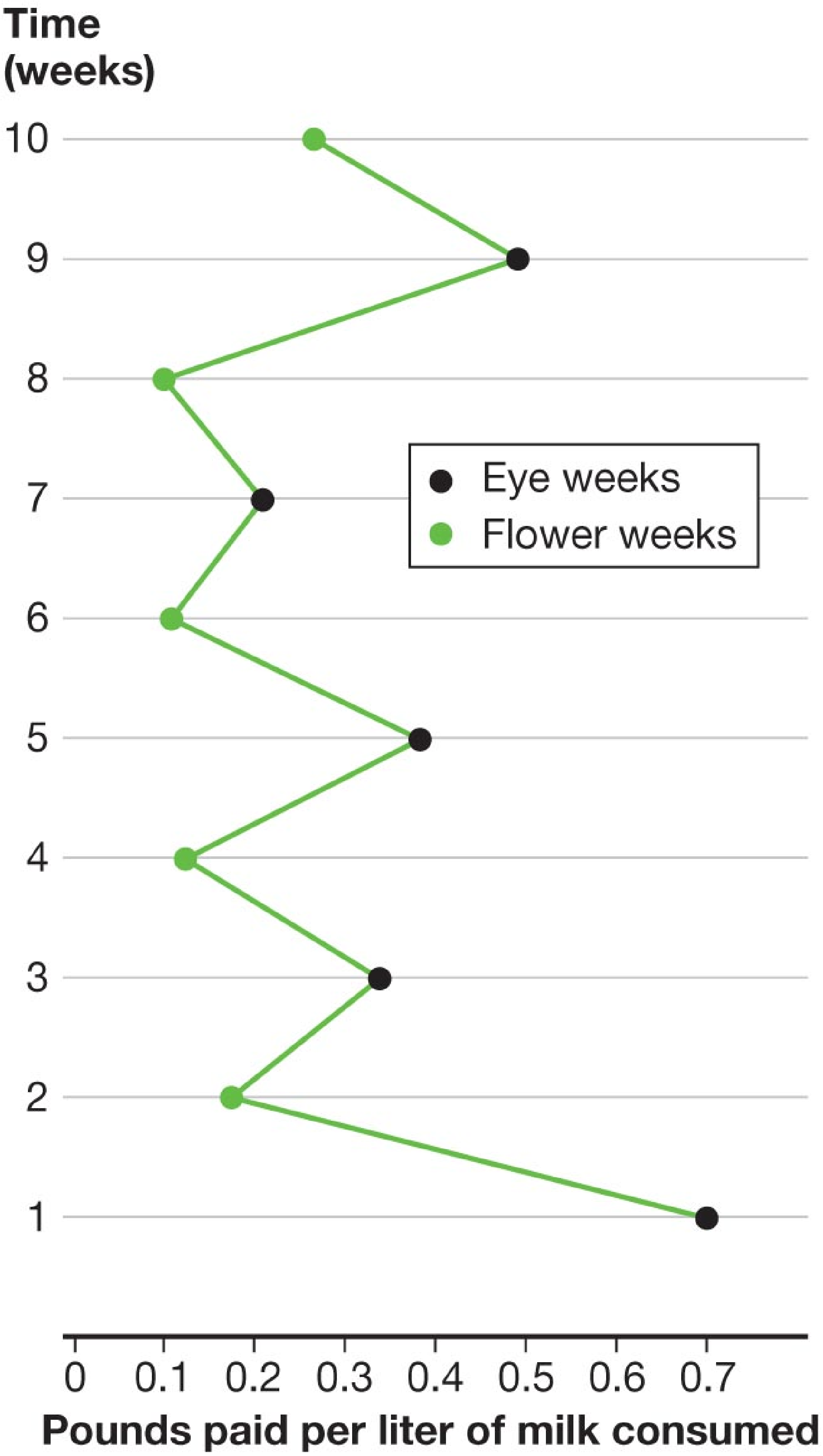

Time (weeks)
10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
Eye weeks
Flower weeks
0
0.1
0.2
0.3
0.4
0.5
0.6
0.7
Pounds paid per liter of milk consumed

FIGURE 12.9 **SELF-AWARENESS AND SOCIALLY APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR IN THE OFFICE** People gave more money to cover the expense of milk when made self-aware by images of people looking at them. Source: Bateson et al., 2006

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE SPOTLIGHT EFFECT The inverse relationship between self-consciousness and deindividuation raises the question of how self-conscious people typically are in the normal course of events. There are pronounced individual differences, of course, in how focused people are on themselves and in how much they believe that others are focused on them, as well (DaSilveira, DeSouza, & Gomes, 2015; Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). But there is also reason to believe that the typical level of self-consciousness is fairly high, particularly when others are around. People begin to feel deindividuated only in the presence of a large crowd. This is why, as Zimbardo proposed, people enjoy feeling deindividuated: It’s a welcome break from the usual self-conscious state.

Evidence that people are indeed prone to a high level of self-consciousness comes from research on the spotlight effect—people’s conviction that other people are paying attention to their appearance and behavior more than is actually the case. People who make an insightful comment in a group discussion, for example, believe that others will notice and remember their comment better than the other people actually do. People who suffer an embarrassing mishap, such as triggering an alarm in a public building or stumbling while entering a lecture hall, think others are judging them more harshly than they actually are (Epley, Savitsky, & Gilovich, 2002; Fortune & Newby-Clark, 2008; Gilovich, Kruger, & Medvec, 2002; Gilovich, Medvec, & Savitsky, 2000; Savitsky, Epley, & Gilovich, 2001).

In one of the clearest demonstrations of the spotlight effect, participants who arrived individually for an experiment were asked to put on a T-shirt sporting a picture of the pop singer Barry Manilow. Despite obvious signs of displeasure, everyone did so. They then reported to another room down the hall where, upon entering, they found a group of fellow students filling out questionnaires. After leaving the room moments later, the participants had to estimate the percentage of those other students who would be able to recall the person pictured on the T-shirt. As predicted, the participants overestimated how much they had stood out in their new shirt. They estimated that roughly half the other students would be able to identify that it was Barry Manilow pictured on their shirt, when in fact only about one-quarter were able to do so (Gilovich et al., 2000).

LOOKING BACK

Research on deindividuation has shown that the diminished sense of self-awareness that sometimes occurs when we are immersed in large groups makes us more likely to get caught up in ongoing events and encourages impulsive, and sometimes destructive, actions. Research on self-awareness and the spotlight effect has shown that we typically monitor our own behavior with an eye toward what others might think, and this awareness of self encourages us to act with a greater sense of propriety.

Glossary

deindividuation

A reduced sense of individual identity accompanied by diminished self-regulation that can come over people when they are in a large group.

individuation

An enhanced sense of individual identity produced by focusing attention on the self, which generally leads people to act carefully, deliberately, and in accordance with their sense of propriety and values.

self-awareness theory

A theory maintaining that when people focus their attention inward on themselves, they become concerned with self-evaluation and how their current behavior conforms to their internal standards and values.

spotlight effect

People’s conviction that other people are paying more attention to them (to their appearance and behavior) than they actually are.

Chapter Review

SUMMARY

The Nature and Purpose of Group Living

- Human beings, like most large primates, are group-living animals who influence and must get along with others.

Social Facilitation

- *Social facilitation* refers to the positive or negative effect that the presence of other people has on performance. Arousal from the presence of others increases people’s tendency to do what comes naturally. On easy tasks, people are predisposed to respond correctly, so the presence of others improves performance; on new or difficult tasks, people are not predisposed to respond correctly, so the presence of others hinders performance.
- The mere presence of others leads to social facilitation effects; other factors, including *evaluation apprehension*, can intensify these effects.
- *Social loafing* is the tendency to exert less effort on a group task when individual contributions cannot be monitored.

Group Decision Making

- *Groupthink* refers to faulty thinking by members of cohesive groups in which critical decision-making scrutiny is undermined by social pressures to reach

consensus. Groupthink has been implicated in various policy fiascos.
- Group decision making is affected by a group’s cohesiveness, by the forcefulness of its leader, and by ingroup pressures that can lead to the rejection of alternative viewpoints and to *self-censorship*, the tendency to refrain from expressing reservations in the face of apparent group consensus.
- Group discussion can create *group polarization*, a phenomenon in which initial leanings tend to become more extreme through group discussion.
- Group polarization can result when group discussion exposes members to arguments in favor of a consensus opinion that are more persuasive than arguments they would have thought of themselves; it can also result from social comparison, when people compare their opinions with those of others.

Power and Social Hierarchy

- Power refers to an individual’s capacity to influence within groups. Power is relational; within groups, power takes the form of social hierarchies, in which group members are arranged in positions of more and less power.
- There are two pathways to gaining power, one grounded in the practice of virtues such as courage, justice, and humanity, and the other found in practicing vices such as narcissism and Machiavellianism.
- According to *approach/inhibition theory*, people in elevated positions of power look at the environment in terms of how they can satisfy their personal desires and act in disinhibited ways, sometimes leading to excesses and abuses.

Deindividuation and the Psychology of Mobs

- Large groups sometimes transform into unruly mobs; the anonymity and diffusion of responsibility people feel in large groups can lead to a mental state of *deindividuation*, in which they are less concerned with future consequences, with normal societal constraints on behavior, and with the consequences of their actions.
- The deindividuated state of getting lost in the crowd contrasts with people’s normal feeling of being individually identifiable. *Self-awareness theory* maintains that focusing attention on the self leads people to a state of *individuation*, marked by careful deliberation and concern with how well their actions conform to their moral standards.
- People tend to overestimate how much they personally stand out and are identifiable to others, a phenomenon known as the *spotlight effect*.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Open-plan offices, where large communal desks are used in place of private rooms or cubicles, are becoming increasingly popular. From the perspective of Zajonc’s social facilitation theory, do you think open-plan offices are likely to facilitate or hinder performance and productivity? Why or why not? How might it depend on the type of work being conducted?
2. Can you think of any times in your own life when groupthink has taken place? What factors contributed to groupthink in these situations? What kinds of safeguards could you put in place in similar future situations to promote better decision making?
3. Suppose your company is trying to decide whether to make a risky new hire. Individually, most of the members of the hiring team lean toward hiring the candidate, as it could substantially increase revenues if it works out.

   When the hiring team gets together to discuss the potential hire, how are the attitudes of the group members likely to shift? What decision is likely to be made?

4. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli argued that people gain power through deception, manipulation, coercion, and the use of fear tactics. How does this perspective compare with research findings about who rises to power?
5. Do you think it’s accurate to say that power corrupts? Why or why not? What factors influence the extent to which power leads to prosocial versus antisocial behavior?
6. How does research on deindividuation help explain why crime rates are so high on Halloween?
7. How could you use your knowledge of self-awareness theory to reduce cheating behavior on a test that relies on the honor system?

The answer guidelines for the Think About It questions can be found at the back of the book . . .

ONLINE STUDY MATERIALS

Want to earn a better grade on your test?

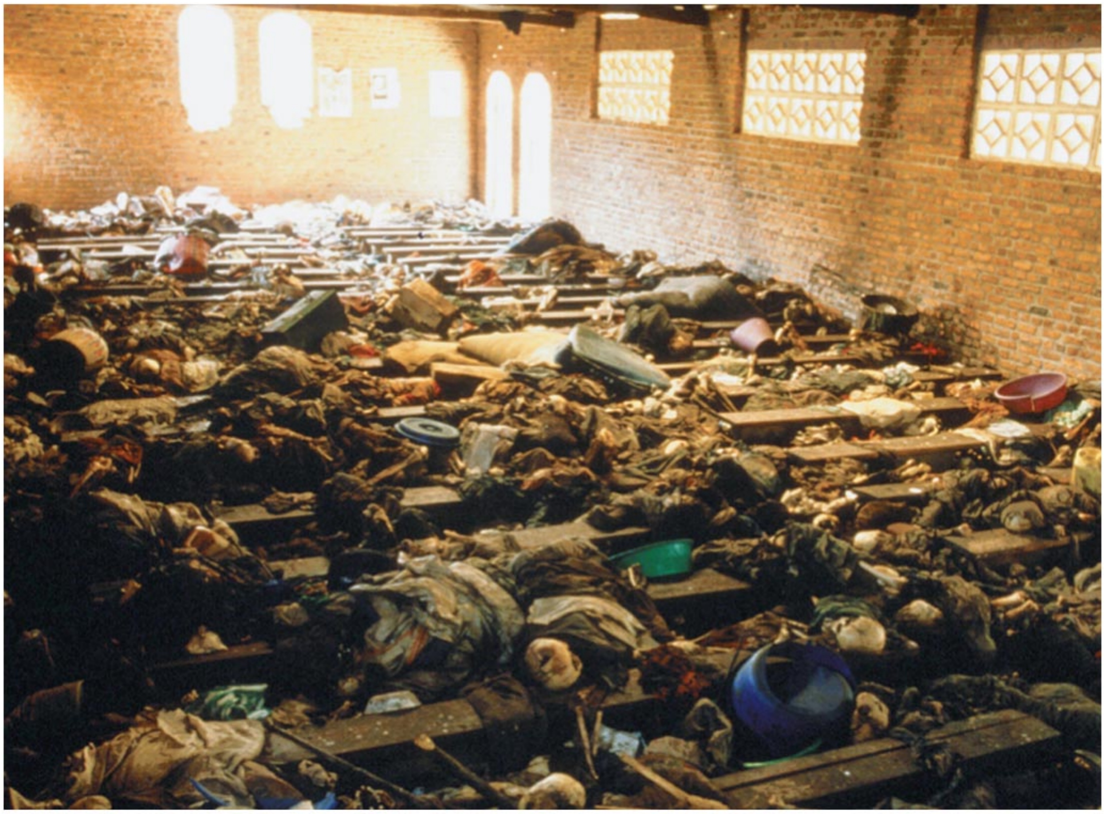
Go to **INQUIZITIVE** to learn and review this chapter’s content, with personalized feedback along the way.

CHAPTER
13

Aggression

Malala
very child, to b
alala .org
world
d
@MalalaFu

What would motivate a person to attack a human rights advocate?



How did peaceful relations between two ethnic groups dissolve into the Rwandan genocide?

#MeToo
survivors' march
TELL SOMEBODY IT HAPPENED TO #METOO
#ME TOO

Can internet activism reduce the prevalence of sexual violence?

OUTLINE

- Situational Determinants of Aggression
- Construal Processes and Aggression
- Culture and Aggression
- Evolution and Aggression
- Conflict and Peacemaking

ON MAY 25, 2020, 17-YEAR-OLD DARNELLA FRAZIER walked with her 9-year-old cousin to Cup Foods Market in Minneapolis to get some snacks. As she was about to enter the store, she saw a White police officer with his knee on a Black man's neck, pinning the man to the ground. Upset, she sent her younger cousin into the store and began filming the incident with her phone.

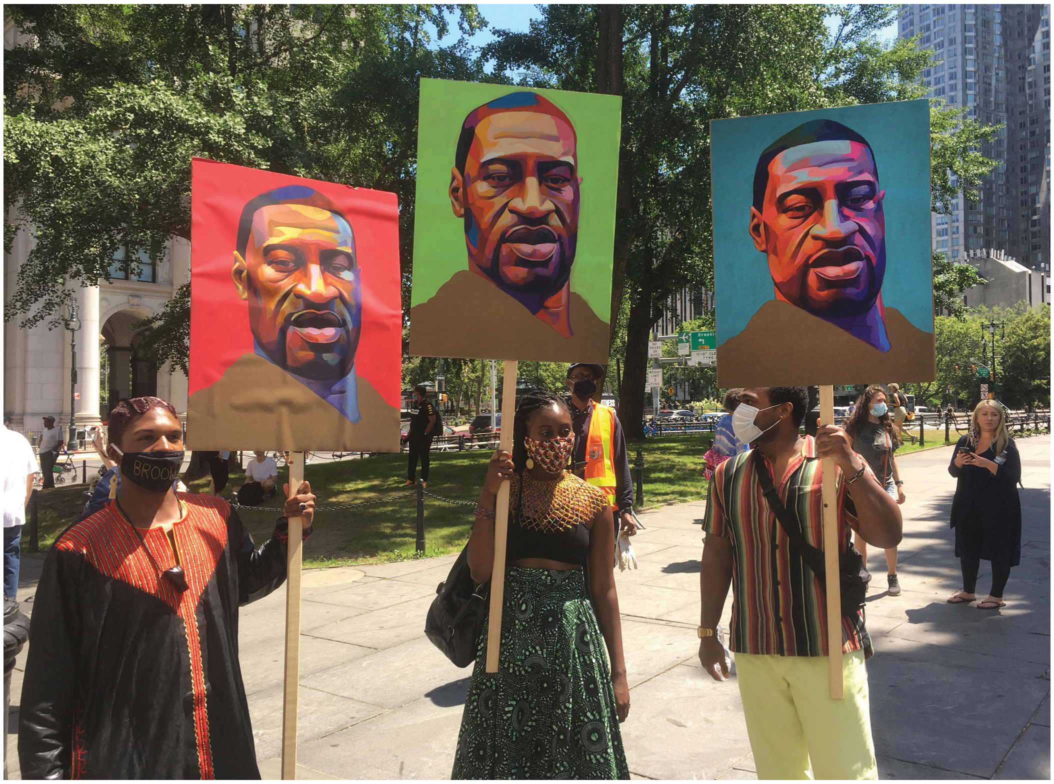
For 10 minutes and 9 seconds, she filmed police officer Derek Chauvin murder George Floyd. In that film, Floyd cried out “I can’t breathe” many times. He said that he was “through.” Toward the end, he called for his mother. When the Minneapolis Police Department issued a statement that a man had died “after medical incident during police interaction,” Frazier went on Facebook and called attention to her video. That video would be viewed hundreds of millions of times. It would inspire protests in more than 60 countries worldwide involving an estimated 15 to 25 million people. Murals of George Floyd were painted on walls in different countries. Frazier’s video would help convict Derek Chauvin of murder.

How do we make sense of Derek Chauvin’s murder of George Floyd, which so many of us have seen in Darnella Frazier’s video? Clearly, the answers will be complex. In studying aggression for decades, social psychologists have identified three kinds of forces that give rise to acts of aggression (C. A. Anderson et al., 2017). The first is the nature of the situation. What was it about that parking lot outside of Cup Foods that day in May that led to Floyd’s murder? How did the racial dynamics between Chauvin and Floyd shape the interaction? What other factors might have been at play? Local economic conditions? The power dynamics between police officers and citizens? Or even more subtle situational forces, such as the weather or the appearance of the neighborhood?

Construal processes are a second force that influences the likelihood of aggression. How people perceive the context—for example, as threatening or not—and how they perceive other people influence whether they act aggressively. Self-construals—such as the perception of one’s own role within the unfolding interaction—matter, too. When police officers wear body cameras, for instance, their awareness of their actions and how they might be contributing to escalating aggression is heightened. This shift toward greater self-awareness leads them to use their weapons less often (Braga et al., 2017).

Third, the likelihood of aggression is influenced by cultural and evolutionary forces. For example, in the United States, nearly 1,000 citizens are killed each year by police officers, whereas only a handful of citizens die in this way annually in France, the United Kingdom, and Sweden. What is it about U.S. culture—its values, practices, and beliefs—that causes this difference? The fact that men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators and victims of aggression, as in Derek Chauvin’s murder of George Floyd, has generated a line of thinking about how evolutionary forces led to such aggressive tendencies in men. And others have homed in on biological forces—a person’s genes or level of testosterone, for instance—that predispose people to high levels of aggression. Derek Chauvin seemed to have a temperament that disposed him to aggression: There had been 18 citizen complaints against him before he murdered George Floyd.

Together, these three kinds of forces—situational, construal-level, and cultural and evolutionary—make up what social psychologists call the general aggression model. Studying how these forces influence our behavior can help us understand the acts of aggression we hear about in the news so frequently. In this chapter, we will apply this thinking to what social psychology has learned about aggression of different kinds, including murders and assaults, school shootings, genocide, and sexual violence. ■



(A)

(B)

GENERAL AGGRESSION MODEL (A) During the pandemic, three protesters in New York City hold up painted signs of the face of George Floyd in protest of his murder by police officer Derek Chauvin. (B) A photo of Derek Chauvin after his conviction of the murder of George Floyd.

Glossary

general aggression model

A broad approach to understanding the causes of aggression through a focus on situational factors, construal factors, and biological and cultural contributions.

Situational Determinants of Aggression

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify some of the situational factors that can lead to aggressive behavior.
- Describe limitations of studies that link exposure to violent media to increased aggression.

One thing that’s striking about police brutality, and other kinds of aggression for that matter, is how quickly situations can become violent. Just as the right ecological conditions can transform a healthy forest into a roaring inferno, the right mix of situational factors can give rise to violence, whether between different religious groups, rival adolescent boys encountering each other on a Friday night, alt-right and antifa (that is, anti-fascist) protesters on college campuses, or children on grade-school playgrounds.

Explanations of aggression vary according to whether the behavior is hostile or instrumental. Hostile aggression refers to behavior motivated by feelings of anger and hostility, where the primary aim is to harm another person, either physically or psychologically. Clearly, the murder of George Floyd emerged out of hostility: Derek Chauvin had a long history of aggressive actions against citizens. Instrumental aggression, in contrast, refers to behavior that is intended to harm another person in the service of motives other than pure hostility. People harm others, for example, to gain status, to attract attention, to acquire wealth, and to advance political and ideological causes. Many acts of aggression involve a mix of hostile and instrumental motives. A football player who intentionally harms someone on the opposing team might do so out of aggressive emotion (hostile aggression) or for a variety of instrumental reasons, such as to foster a reputation for fearlessness, to help his team win, or to make the kinds of plays that secure his place on the team or that will win him a lucrative contract.

It’s tempting to believe that aggression is largely carried out by aggressive people—the bullies, sociopaths, and criminal personalities among us. There may be some truth to this belief, but social psychology shows how a situational perspective is crucial to understanding aggression.

Hot Weather

The opening line of Spike Lee’s classic movie *Do the Right Thing* comes from a radio newscaster who says, “It’s hot out there, folks.” It’s early in the morning, and the main characters are already uncomfortable and sweating profusely. By the end of the day, tensions between African Americans and Italian Americans escalate, and a race riot ensues.

People have long believed in an association between heat and aggression. We think of angry people as “boiling over,” “steamed,” or “hot under the collar.” But are people more aggressive when it’s hot outside? As early as the nineteenth century, people noted that violent crime rates were higher in southern France and southern Italy, where the temperatures are hotter, than in northern France and northern Italy. Of course, other factors—such as levels of unemployment, per capita income, ethnic composition, the proportion of young men in the population—might also have produced these regional differences.

Craig Anderson has provided evidence that higher-than-normal temperatures do indeed play a causal role in the increase of violent crime (C. A. Anderson, 1987, 1989). Anderson examined the crime rates of 260 U.S. cities during the year 1980. For each city, he identified the number of days when the temperature exceeded 90 degrees Fahrenheit. The number of hot days (above 90 degrees) was a strong predictor of elevated violent crime rates but not nonviolent crime rates, even when controlling for the city’s level of unemployment, per capita income, and average age of its citizens (C. A. Anderson, 1987). In **Figure 13.1**, you can see that the incidence of murder and rape increases during the summer months.

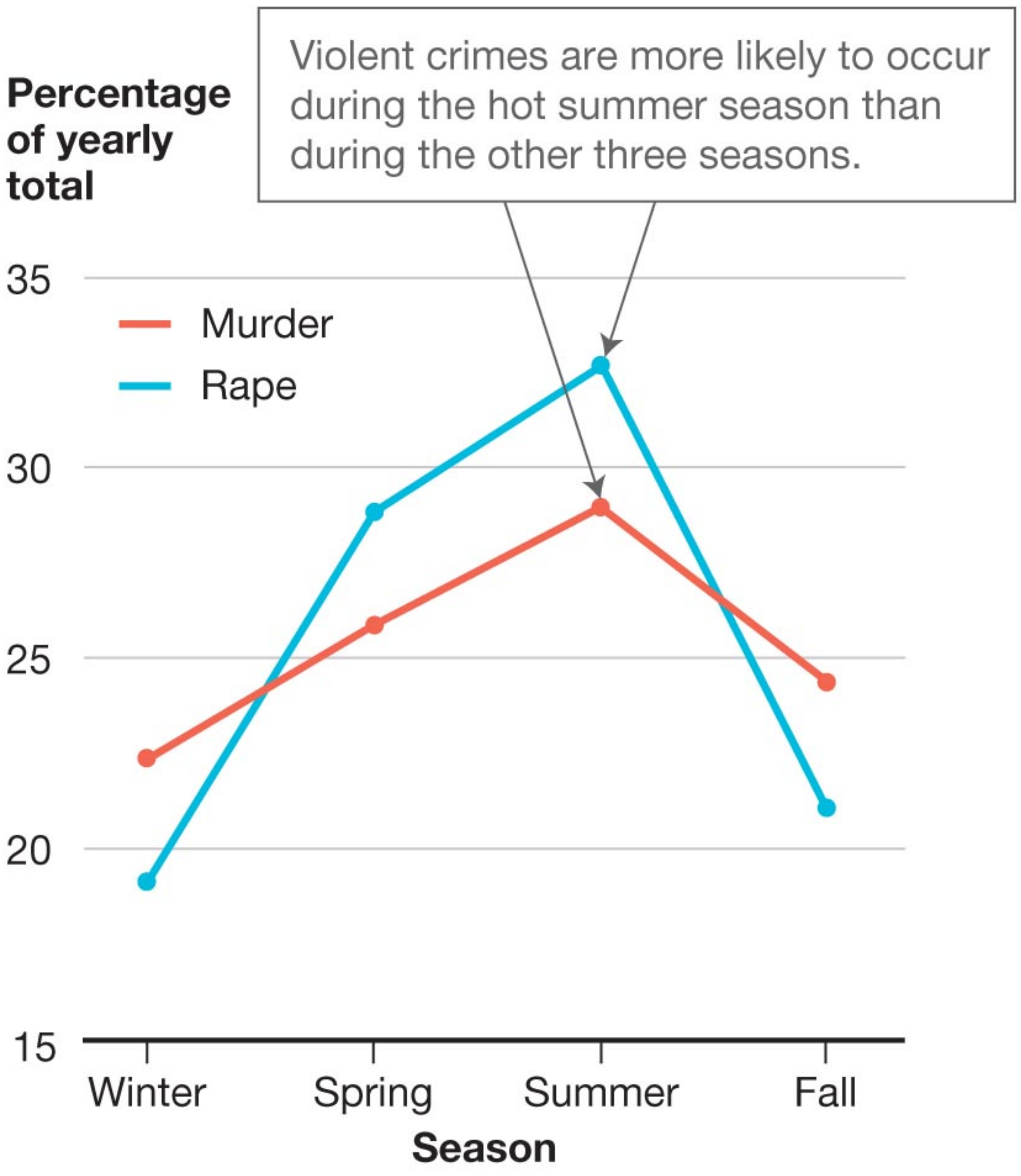


FIGURE 13.1 **SEASONAL EFFECTS ON VIOLENT BEHAVIOR** Do the hot months of summer make people more aggressive? Various studies of aggressive behaviors throughout different months of the year indicate that they do. Source: Adapted from Anderson, 1989, p. 82.

If you were to translate this work to a laboratory study, how would you do it? One simple idea would be to see if aggression is more likely in hot rooms as opposed to more comfortable rooms. In studies using this simple experimental manipulation, researchers have found that in a hot laboratory room (97 degrees), college students applied longer and more aggressive bursts of white noise to a confederate who had provoked them (C. A. Anderson & DeLisi, 2011). When being trained in a hot room as opposed to a comfortable room, Dutch police officers going through simulations perceived potential criminals as more aggressive and were more likely to draw their guns (Vrij, van der Steen, & Koppelaar, 1994).

JOYERÍA PÉREZ
VADO PERMANENTE

(A)

(B)

HEAT AND AGGRESSIVE ACTION (A) An altercation on a hot day in Madrid, Spain. (B) A couple enjoying a walk on a cool fall day.

One of the cleverest studies of heat and aggression found that as the weather gets hotter, Major League Baseball pitchers are more likely to hit batters with a pitch (Reifman, Larrick, & Fein, 1991). This is especially true when the pitcher’ s teammates have been hit by the opposing pitcher earlier in the game (Larrick et al., 2011). This effect cannot be attributed to heat’ s effect on the pitcher’ s ability to control pitches: Neither wild pitches nor walks increase with the temperature (Kenrick & MacFarlane, 1984).

Such findings are especially troubling because the past five years have been the hottest on record—a recipe, perhaps, for yet another consequence of climate change: a more aggressive world. For example, over the past 55 years, with every rise in annual temperature of 1 degree Celsius, there have been 7.5 more assaults and homicides per 100,000 people in the United States, after controlling for such variables as inequality, poverty, and rates of incarceration (C. A. Anderson & DeLisi, 2011). Solomon Hsiang and his colleagues looked at data for the past 50 years and found that during “El Niño” years in tropical countries, when the weather is especially hot and dry, the likelihood of civil conflict rises dramatically (Hsiang, Meng, & Cane, 2011).

What is it about hot weather that makes people more aggressive? One explanation involves people’ s attributions for their discomfort (see Chapter 4). People are aroused by the heat, but they are often unaware of the extent to which hot weather is the source of their arousal. When they encounter circumstances that prompt anger—say, a discourteous driver or an overly critical comment from a romantic partner—they attribute their own arousal to that person, and this misplaced annoyance gives rise to amplified feelings of anger, which can lead to aggression.

> “I pray thee good Mercutio, let’s retire;
>
> The day is hot, the Capulets abroad.
>
> And, if we meet, we shall not ’scape a brawl,
>
> For now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring.”
>
> —WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *ROMEO AND JULIET*

Media Violence

The average American adolescent spends about 9 hours a day on computers, handheld devices, and television screens. These visual media are saturated with images of aggression. By age 18, the average viewer of American TV has seen about 200,000 acts of violence—from murders and beatings on weekly crime dramas to dead bodies on the nightly news (Rideout, 2015). Social media like Facebook and Instagram further expose people to images of violence, such as the video of the murder of George Floyd. Does the violence portrayed in the media make people more aggressive?

Researchers have explored this question by examining the immediate effects of media violence on aggression (C. A. Anderson et al., 2010). In these studies, participants view aggressive films and then have an opportunity to act in an aggressive fashion, such as by administering a shock to a confederate of the researcher who is acting in a confrontational manner. In these types of controlled experiments with appropriate comparison conditions, exposure to media violence does indeed make people more aggressive. For example, watching aggressive films led juvenile delinquents confined in a minimum-security prison to be more aggressive (Leyens et al., 1975). Watching aggressive films also made undergraduate men apply more intense shocks to a female confederate when made to feel angry (Donnerstein, 1980; Donnerstein & Berkowitz, 1981), and when the videos were violently pornographic, men more strongly endorsed violence against women (Allen et al., 1995). Still other studies have found that media violence is especially likely to lead to aggression when viewers identify with the perpetrator of violence in the film or view the violence as justified and perpetrated against “bad people” (Leyens, Cisneros, & Hossay, 1976; Leyens & Picus, 1973).

But before concluding that media violence causes aggression, let’s consider a couple of limitations of these lab studies. First, the measures of aggression, such as applying electric shock to a confederate, may have little to do with real-world violence—murder, rape, assault, genocide, and hate crimes. Another limitation is that these studies have captured only the short-term effects on aggression after exposure to violent media and haven’t addressed the possibility of more enduring effects.

One more recent study suggests that some caution is due in concluding that exposure to real-world media violence leads to actual acts of aggression outside the lab. In this study, researchers examined whether the rate of violent crime tends to rise or fall on dates surrounding the theatrical release of violent blockbuster films, such as *Hannibal*, a film popular at the time the study was conducted, or for comparison, today the *Saw* movies (Dahl & DellaVigna, 2009). Contrary to what you might expect, on days when viewership of violent films in theaters rose, violent crimes actually dropped. For every million additional viewers of violent films, there was a 1.1 to 1.3 percent drop in violent crimes on the day in question. Viewership of violent films was especially likely to be associated with reduced violent crime during the evening and early-morning hours of the day, when viewership was high. The authors explain this result in two ways: First, people who are most likely to commit violent crimes—young men—are particularly drawn to violent films and are less likely to engage in acts of aggression when sitting in a theater seat watching a movie. This account explains the decrease in crime between 6 p.m. and midnight, when the movies are showing. Second, to explain the even larger drop in the crime rate from midnight to 6 a.m., the authors note that the time spent in the theater is a time when some violent individuals might otherwise be drinking alcohol, a contributor to aggression. Being in the theater at a key point in the evening therefore puts them in a context—quietly watching a movie—where they are less likely to engage in aggressive acts. In general, then, it does seem that viewing media violence increases aggressive tendencies, although there are some interesting counterexamples.

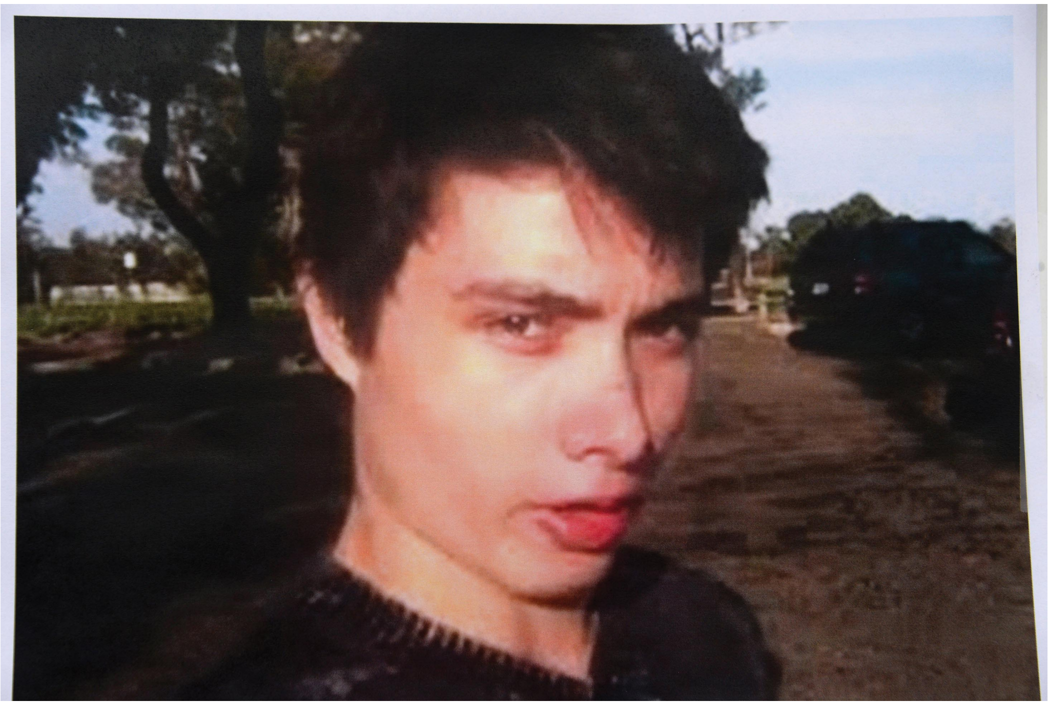
Violent Video Games

About 85 percent of American teenagers play video games regularly, averaging around 13 hours of play a week (C. A. Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Gentile, 2009). Boys spend more time playing (just over 16 hours a week) than girls (about 9 hours). Some 8 percent of American children spend an average of 24 hours a week playing video games.

Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were two such aficionados of video games—and violent games specifically—their favorite game being *Doom*. Harris, in fact, created a custom version of *Doom* in which two shooters, armed with extra weapons and unlimited ammunition, would gun down helpless victims. Tragically, on April 20, 1999, Harris and Klebold took several guns and massive amounts of ammunition to their school, Columbine High School, in Littleton, Colorado. There they killed 12 of their classmates and a teacher and injured another 23 students before killing themselves.

Are violent video games to blame for this kind of unconscionable violence? Certainly, it can be tempting to think so, for such incidents can lead us to search for simple explanations. But clearly the causes of school shootings like the Columbine massacre are numerous and complex, perhaps including forms of psychopathology, profound isolation, and a history of abuse. In fact, research to date has yet to find evidence linking violent video games to school shootings or other extreme acts of violence.

(A)


(B)

VIOLENT VIDEO GAMES AND AGGRESSION (A) This is an image from a violent video game, World of Warcraft. The correlation documented in lab studies between playing such games and aggressive thoughts and behavior may play out in real life. (B) Elliot Rodger was an avid video game player who went on a shooting spree near the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara.

In this section we ask a subtler question: How does playing violent video games shift our everyday social tendencies—such as our thoughts about other people, our inclination to be aggressive or kind, or even our physiology—in ways that might incline us toward aggressive action? Research by Craig Anderson, Brad Bushman, and colleagues suggests that playing violent video games does shift our thoughts and emotions in ways that might increase the likelihood of less extreme forms of aggression (Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Anderson et al., 2017).

In one illustrative study, 43 undergraduate women and men with an average amount of experience playing video games were randomly assigned to play one of two games (Bartholow & Anderson, 2002). Some played *Mortal Kombat*, in which the player chooses a character and attempts to kill six other characters, winning points for each violent death. Others played *PGA Tournament Golf*, in which players complete 18 holes of simulated golf, choosing appropriate clubs and shots best suited to the simulated wind conditions and the layout of sand traps and trees. All participants played several rounds of one of these two games against a confederate. When participants lost, the confederate punished them with an unpleasant, loud burst of white noise. When participants won, they returned the favor, punishing the confederate with white noise. Participants who had played *Mortal Kombat* gave longer and more intense bursts of white noise to their competitor than those who had played the golf game.

Dozens of studies have considered the effects of playing violent video games. Some were experiments, like the study just described. Others were longitudinal studies examining whether the amount of time children spend playing violent video games predicts their level of aggression months later (Anderson et al., 2008). Anderson and his colleagues have documented five ways in which playing violent video games inclines us toward greater aggression (Anderson et al., 2017). Playing these games appears to (1) increase aggressive behavior, such as giving more intense punishment to confederates in a study; (2) reduce prosocial behavior; (3) increase aggressive thoughts, such as that the world is a hostile place or that some people are deserving of aggression; (4) increase aggressive emotions, especially anger; and (5) increase blood pressure and heart rate, two physiological responses associated with aggression. These effects were observed in children and adults, both male and female, in the United States, several European countries, and Japan.

BOX 13.1

Not So Fast: **Critical Thinking About Third Variables and False Associations**

In light of research showing the increased numbers of young people watching violent TV shows and playing violent video games, you might be tempted to make a gloomy prediction: Violent behavior must be rising dramatically among young people. Not so. Although kids today are exposed to more violence in the media and are playing more violent video games than they did in the past, rates of violent behavior among young people are actually declining.

What’s going on? How can the association between exposure to violence and aggression observed in society be the opposite of what has been documented in the lab? Critics of studies linking media and violent video game exposure to increased aggression have brought into focus the *third-variable critique*. Recall from Chapter 2 that in correlational research, researchers must take into account variables that weren’t measured but that might be responsible for the observed association between the two variables of interest. For example, if you find that the amount of ice cream people eat is associated with the likelihood of violent behavior, you would wisely attribute such an association to a third variable described in this chapter: hot weather. People eat more ice cream and engage in more violent behavior when it’s hot (the third variable), so the apparent relationship between eating ice cream and violence is false. The relationship is produced by some other cause.

What unmeasured variables, then, might produce the association between childhood exposure to violence in media and video games and later aggressive behavior? Chris Ferguson and his colleagues have noted a few (C. J. Ferguson & Kilburn, 2010). Rarely do studies measure aggressive behavior in a child’s peer group, yet kids who hang around aggressive peers are almost certainly more likely to play violent video games and to engage in aggressive behavior. Some studies find that when the aggression of the peer group is controlled for, the association between playing the games and subsequent aggression is reduced (C. J. Ferguson, San Miguel, & Hartley, 2009).

Let’s consider another unmeasured variable: the level of violence in the family. It’s well established that a violent family atmosphere—where cruel comments, harsh punishment, and physical and emotional abuse are daily occurrences—is one of the strongest predictors of children acting out in aggressive ways. And a violent family environment is also associated with the tendency to consume violent media. A hostile family environment, then, might account for the observed association between playing violent video games and later aggression. (The same point can be made, of course, about violent TV shows and movies.)

Given these concerns, the American Psychological Association brought together a group of scholars to review studies on video games (Calvert et al., 2017). Importantly, this review replicated Bushman and Anderson’s findings that exposure to violent video games is associated with increased aggressive behavior, aggressive thoughts, blood pressure, and anger. This same review found that exposure to violent video games led to reductions in prosocial tendencies. It also answered some of the questions about third variables that we have just raised. Most notably, this review documented that violent video game exposure was associated with increased aggression even after controlling for a child’s initial level of aggressive tendencies, delinquency, poor academic achievement, and parental conflict. What has not been documented to date, however, is that exposure to violent video games leads to delinquent behavior and criminal arrest in the real world.

Social Rejection and Aggression

School shootings like the Columbine massacre prompt considerable reflection about why they happen. Alongside the debate surrounding violent video games, many have speculated that social rejection contributes to violence. In the case of the Columbine shooting, Harris and Klebold felt rejected by the more popular students at school, and their shooting rampage was viewed by many as a reaction to being bullied and ostracized. Following the massacre, the U.S. Department of Education issued a report endorsing this hypothesis, concluding that school shooters tend to feel rejected by their peers. Of course, it’s clear that social rejection by itself wasn’t sufficient cause for their behavior, and many accounts of the tragedy emphasize the underlying pathologies of both boys (Cullen, 2009).

SOCIAL ISOLATION AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR In 2012, Adam Lanza fatally shot 20 first-graders and 6 teachers at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. His social circumstances echo those of Harris and Klebold, perpetrators of the Columbine massacre. Lanza immersed himself in violent chat rooms and video games on the internet. Throughout his life, he experienced profound rejection and isolation, remaining holed up in his room for three continuous months before the shooting took place.

Social rejection, whether in the form of being excluded, bullied, or shamed online, can lead people to react in different ways (Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2021). Sometimes when people are socially rejected, they actually turn to prosocial behaviors, such as reaching out to friends and allies. A second fairly common response to rejection is to withdraw socially. A third is aggression.

How might social rejection contribute to aggression? Geoff MacDonald and Mark Leary (2005) have offered the following analysis: In our evolutionary history, we were profoundly dependent on one another for food, shelter, warmth, and defense, the very foundations of our survival. In this context, social rejection was extremely perilous and came to activate a “threat defense system” that involves cardiovascular arousal, the stress hormone cortisol, feelings of distress, and associated fight-or-flight tendencies. Early in our primate evolution, this threat defense system was attuned to cues of physical aggression, such as a predator’s attack. As humans evolved into the very social primates that we are, social cues—overhearing gossip, spotting a sneer or contemptuous eye roll, detecting a superior’s critical tone of voice, or receiving harsh comments on an online post—acquired the power to activate this threat defense system.

Numerous studies have documented how social rejection sets in motion feelings that can lead to aggression. For example, people who feel rejected report higher levels of chronic physical pain (MacDonald & Leary, 2005). Rodolfo Mendoza-Denton and Wendy Berry Mendes have found that people who feel rejected because of their gender, race, or social class, both within specific social contexts and chronically, tend to show elevated levels of threat-related physiology, such as increased blood pressure or higher levels of cortisol (Eliezer, Major, & Mendes, 2010; Jamieson et al., 2013; John-Henderson et al., 2014).

To study the painful consequences of rejection, Kip Williams developed an ingenious ball-tossing paradigm, which may remind you of the politics of playdates in grammar school or the exclusive, judgmental cliques of middle school. In these studies, the participant plays a ball-tossing game with two confederates. At a predetermined time in the experiment, the two confederates stop throwing the ball to the participant and throw it back and forth to each other for 5 minutes. Sure enough, being rejected in this game triggers feelings of distress, shame, and self-doubt in the participant and initiates a submissive, slouched posture (K. D. Williams, 2007).

In a neuroimaging study conducted by Naomi Eisenberger and her colleagues, participants thought they were playing a computerized version of the ball-tossing game with two other people. In actuality, the actions of the two “people” had been programmed by the experimenter (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003). When participants experienced this virtual form of rejection akin to the experience of rejection in in-person ball tossing studies, fMRI images revealed activity in a region of the brain called the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex, which processes physically painful stimuli (Eisenberger, 2015). Subsequent studies have found that reliving a romantic breakup also activates this region of the brain (Kross et al., 2011). The evidence thus suggests that social rejection can trigger a threat defense system. But it should be noted that this association may not be inevitable: People who practice mindfulness—ways of calming down in the face of stress—don’t show this pattern of brain activation when socially rejected (Martelli et al., 2018).

Social rejection also increases the likelihood of aggression. People who report a chronic sense of rejection are more likely to act aggressively in their romantic relationships, even resorting to physical abuse (Dutton, 2002). In experimental work by Jean Twenge and her colleagues, people who were led to imagine a lonely, socially rejected future were more likely than control participants to administer unpleasant noise blasts to strangers who had nothing to do with the participant’s rejection (Twenge et al., 2001). Although it has been estimated that more than 85 percent of school shooters have had histories of profound social rejection (Leary et al., 2003), it’s important to remember that many other factors are likely at play in why school shootings occur, from family dynamics to genetic tendencies, and that much of the evidence linking social rejection to actual violence is correlational, not causal.

Income Inequality

Thus far we have considered how immediate features of a situation, like hot weather, violent media, and social rejection, can lead to higher levels of aggression. Increasingly, social psychologists are asking whether aggression might also stem from more enduring structural conditions, such as the economic conditions of a geographical region or the number of parks and green spaces in the neighborhood where an individual resides. Let’s first consider one such economic factor: a society’s level of income inequality, or the degree to which people differ in their yearly income and net wealth. Some countries are characterized by high economic inequality, in which the highest-paid professionals—CEOs, lawyers, and financial managers—earn vastly higher salaries than the average worker. The United States is characterized by moderately high levels of inequality. As you can see in **Figure 13.2**, income inequality in the United States is higher than in every European country and is exceeded in only a few countries elsewhere, such as the Philippines, Venezuela, and South Africa.

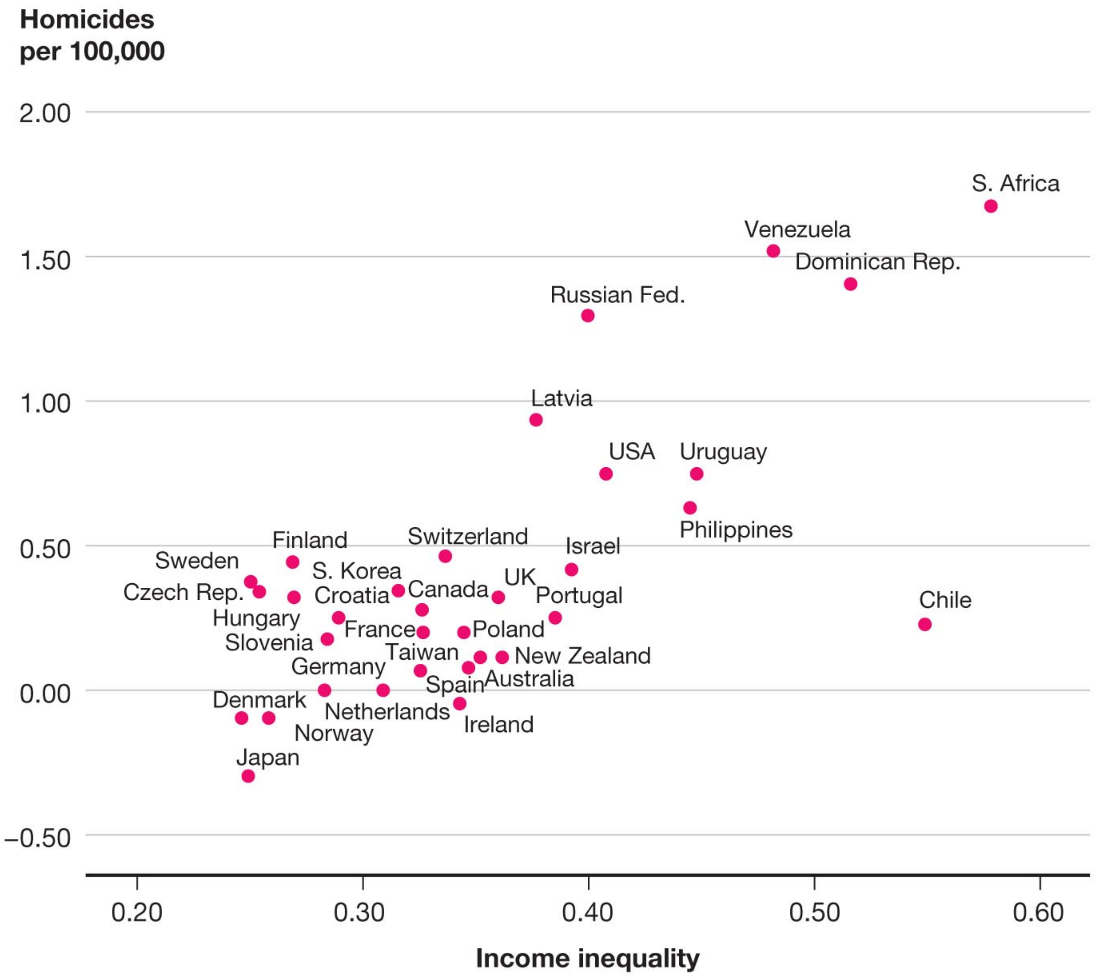


FIGURE 13.2 **INCOME INEQUALITY AND HOMICIDE RATES** Homicides are more likely to occur in countries where there is greater income inequality between the rich and the poor. Source: Adapted from Elgar & Aitken, 2011.

Is economic inequality associated with increased violence? To explore this question, researchers measured the degree of inequality in a geographical region such as a state, country, or neighborhood in terms of differences between its relatively wealthy residents (usually the top 20 percent) and its relatively poor residents (usually the bottom 20 percent; R. Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). They then looked at whether regional inequality correlates with the prevalence of different kinds of violence. They found that the average citizen is much more likely to be murdered, assaulted, or raped in countries characterized by high economic inequality, such as Venezuela, South Africa, and the United States, than in countries with less economic inequality, such as Japan, Ireland, and Norway. In addition, children in countries with greater income inequality are more likely to experience conflict with their peers and to report being victims of bullying.

This pattern emerges as well when U.S. states are classified according to their levels of economic inequality. Rates of homicide, for example, are higher in states with relatively high inequality (such as Louisiana and California) than they are in states with lower inequality (such as Utah and Wisconsin). On an even more local scale, rates of violence are higher in U.S. neighborhoods with higher income inequality than they are in neighborhoods with lower income inequality (Morenoff, Sampson, & Raudenbush, 2001).

Why might income inequality give rise to aggression? Social psychologists have provided several explanations. For example, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009) found that the powerful feelings of social rejection that those at the bottom experience in unequal societies can trigger violence. Another possibility is that inequality undermines feelings of trust and goodwill among people, which can give rise to frustration, anger, and ultimately aggression. Consistent with this idea, researchers have found that during times of growing economic inequality in a country, citizens are less happy, experience greater physical pain, and feel less trusting of others (Daniels, Berkman, & Kawachi, 2000; Oishi, Kesebir, & Diener, 2011). These feelings, in turn, wear down the social fabric and so may increase the likelihood of aggression. Finally, evolutionary psychologists Martin Daly, Margot Wilson, and Shawn Vasdev (2001) contend that inequality throws men into more intense competition for economic resources and access to mates, two sources of conflict that often motivate murder and other crimes.

Green Spaces and Access to Nature

In 1984, E. O. Wilson coined the term *biophilia*, which refers to humans’ love of life and living systems (E. O. Wilson, 1984). This sort of love inspired the transcendentalist philosophers Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose writings about the natural world inspired today’s environmentalist movement. These writers found great perspective and peace in being in the woods. Many Indigenous peoples around the globle participate in time-honored traditions of reverence for the natural world. Might nature make for more peaceful citizens?

Social psychologists have recently begun to examine how easy access to nature and green spaces influences our psychological health. Recent experiments have found, for example, that a walk in the woods (as opposed to a walk through a town) enables adults to perform better on a measure of concentrated attention (Berman, Jonides, & Kaplan, 2008). Experiences in nature are the best predictor, compared with other recreational activities, of calming people down from the stress of work (Korpela & Kinnunen, 2009). In one study, after high school students from impoverished urban areas and veterans struggling with post-traumatic stress went rafting on a mountain river for a day, they enjoyed greater well-being, less stress, and stronger relations with their friends and families for a week (C. L. Anderson, Monroy, & Keltner, 2018). In geographical regions where people have greater access to beautiful green spaces, people tend to report greater happiness and goodwill toward others (Green & Keltner, 2017). In fact, a recent review found that immersion in nature benefits happiness and almost every health condition, from cardiovascular problems to diabetes and depression (M. Kuo, 2015).

BEING OUTDOORS AND PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH Urban areas that include green spaces encourage greater calm and civility and less aggression.

These findings raise a question: Might green spaces decrease neighborhood violence? Social psychologist Frances Kuo thinks so. In one line of research, Kuo studied police reports of violence occurring near 98 low-rise buildings in Chicago’s Ida Wells housing project (F. E. Kuo & Sullivan, 2001). Some of the buildings were surrounded by trees and lawns, others by asphalt and a lack of greenery. The residents in these 98 buildings came from similar backgrounds, were enduring similar levels of unemployment and economic hardship, and had been randomly assigned to the buildings they lived in. Kuo discovered that the likelihood of violent crime was lower near apartments surrounded by green spaces. The effect of green space on crime was convincingly established by an experiment in which dozens of dirty, trash-ridden lots in high-poverty neighborhoods of Philadelphia were randomly selected to be cleaned up and planted with greenery (Branas et al., 2018).

Other lots were left in their original state. The areas surrounding the cleaned-up lots experienced a 22 percent reduction in burglary and a 29 percent reduction in gun violence when compared with the control condition, suggesting that simple ways of bringing natural beauty to neighborhoods can reduce aggression.

LOOKING BACK

Many situational factors contribute to the likelihood of aggressive behavior. These include hot weather, violence in the media, violent video games, social rejection, economic inequality, and living in environments lacking in green spaces.

Glossary

hostile aggression
Behavior intended to harm another person, either physically or psychologically, and motivated by feelings of anger and hostility.

instrumental aggression
Behavior intended to harm another person in the service of motives other than pure hostility (such as attracting attention, acquiring wealth, or advancing political or ideological causes).

Construal Processes and Aggression

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- List some construals that lead to aggression and explain how people can modify these construals to avoid acting aggressively.
- Define dehumanization and describe the factors that make dehumanization more likely.

Situations do nothing by themselves to incite aggression; it is how people construe situations that matters. Most people who live in extremely hot environments, frequently see violent images in movies or video games, or encounter social rejection and income inequality do so without acting aggressively. Given this, we need to understand how different construals of such contexts can lead some individuals to act aggressively. Let’s explore, then, how particular construals lead to aggressive behavior.

Anger

For centuries, social theorists have known that anger leads to aggression. Leonard Berkowitz has offered a detailed theory about the role of construal in the relationship between anger and aggression. He argues that any unpleasant stimulus can trigger a fight-or-flight response of anger. This is true for obvious causes of aggression, such as being insulted or cut off in traffic, as well as such factors as physical discomfort, hunger, and feelings of shame and depression (Berkowitz, 1989, 1993). Once angry, people are more likely to think things are unfair, to perceive others as having more combative intentions, and to imagine ways of inflicting harm (DeSteno et al., 2000; Huber et al., 2015; Keltner, Ellsworth, & Edwards, 1993). This line of thinking helps clarify when aspects of a situation will lead to anger and aggression. For instance, sometimes hot weather doesn’t trigger anger (it could very well prompt relaxation in the hammock instead) and thus won’t lead to aggressive behavior. Other times, though, the discomfort of extreme heat will elicit feelings of anger, leading individuals to construe the present context in ways that make aggression more likely.

In one provocative test of this theory, Berkowitz examined how anger and the presence of weapons combine to make people more aggressive. Today, weapons are commonplace in many parts of the world. Worldwide, roughly 650 million guns are in the hands of civilians, and in the United States, there are more than 120 guns for every 100 citizens (Small Arms Survey, 2019). Firearms are involved in about 75 percent of homicides in the United States and 50 percent of suicides (UC Davis Health, 2021). According to Berkowitz, though, the presence of guns will lead to aggression only when combined with experiences of anger.

To test this hypothesis, Berkowitz had pairs composed of one participant and one confederate, both men, work on a series of reasoning problems and take turns “evaluating each other’s performance” by delivering shocks for performances that needed improvement (Berkowitz & LePage, 1967). The participant worked on the problems first and then was shocked by the confederate. In the neutral condition, the confederate shocked the participant one time, and in the anger condition, seven times. The participant then watched the confederate work and provided feedback in one of three conditions. In a “no object” condition, no objects were near the shock machine. In a “neutral object” condition, badminton rackets and shuttlecocks were near the shock machine. In a “gun” condition, a revolver and a shotgun lay near the shock machine—rather unusual experimental props, to say the least.

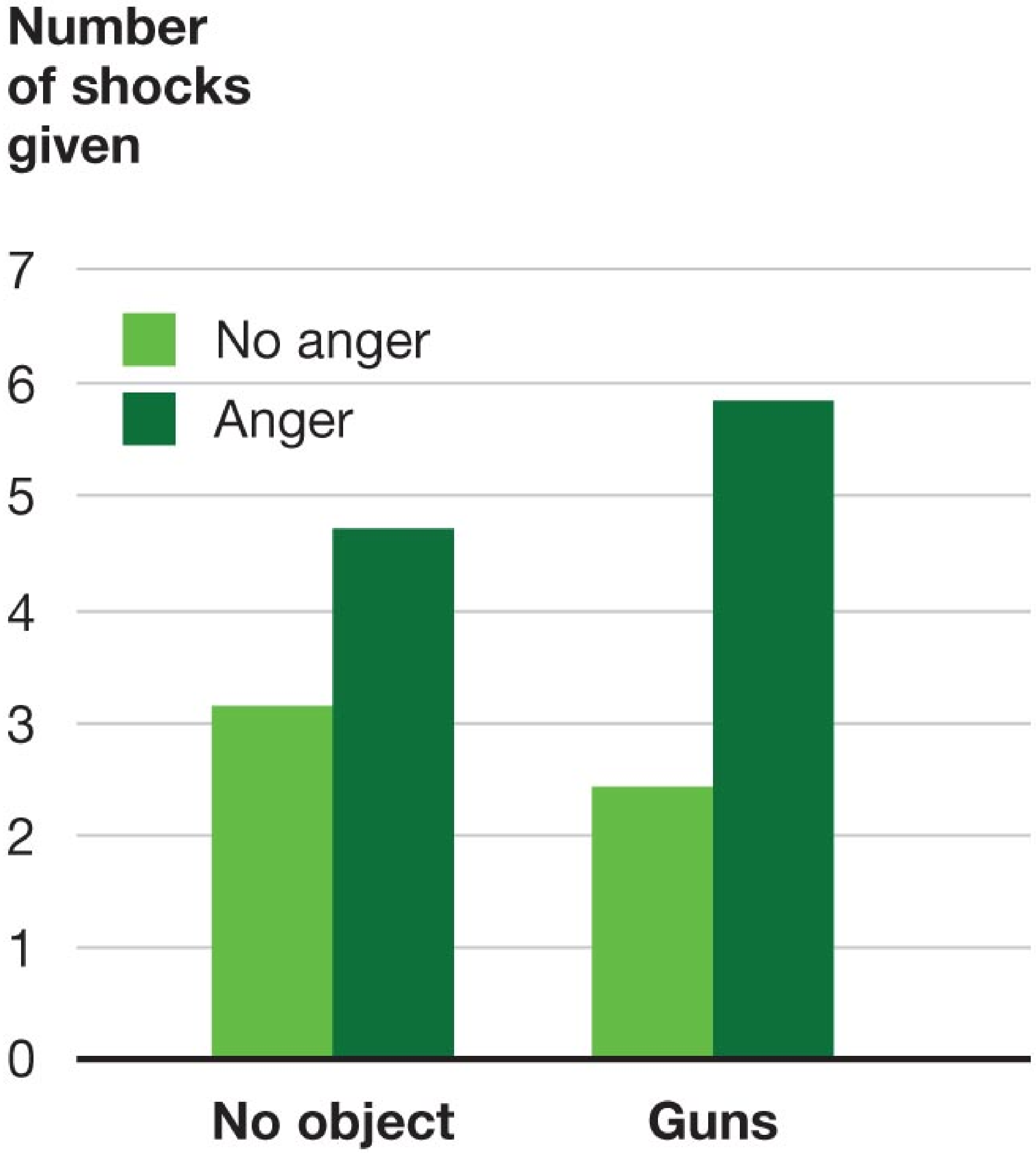


FIGURE 13.3 **ANGER, WEAPONS, AND AGGRESSION** When people are angry and in the presence of weapons, they behave more aggressively. Source: Adapted from Berkowitz & LePage, 1967.

As you can see in **Figure 13.3**, the presence of guns made participants more aggressive only when they were also angered by the confederate’s actions (that is, after being shocked seven times in the anger condition). In further support of the point that the presence of guns alone does not trigger aggression, a more recent study found that hunters don’t become more aggressive when presented with images of guns, probably because they construe guns as objects for recreation and fun rather than for violence (Bartholow et al., 2005).

> “Anybody can become angry—that is easy, but to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is not within everybody’s power and is not easy.”
>
> —ARISTOTLE

BOX 13.2

FOCUS ON SPORTS

The Effect of Uniform Color on Aggression

The tendency to act more aggressively when a weapon is nearby reinforces a core lesson of social psychology—the situationist message that seemingly small changes in the environment (such as the presence of a weapon) can have a substantial impact on behavior. This tendency also raises the question of whether other environmental cues might foster or inhibit aggression. For example, might the clothes people wear influence how they behave, including whether they behave aggressively? Is it possible that the menacing black shirts worn by Hitler’ s SS (*Schutzstaffel*) made it easier for them to brutalize the populace of conquered lands?

Support for such a possibility comes from research on the effect of uniform color on aggressiveness in professional sports (M. G. Frank & Gilovich, 1988). The investigators began by examining the penalty records of all teams in American professional football (the NFL) and ice hockey (the NHL) from 1970 to 1985. As shown in **Figure 13.4**, the black-uniformed teams consistently ranked near the top in penalties every year.

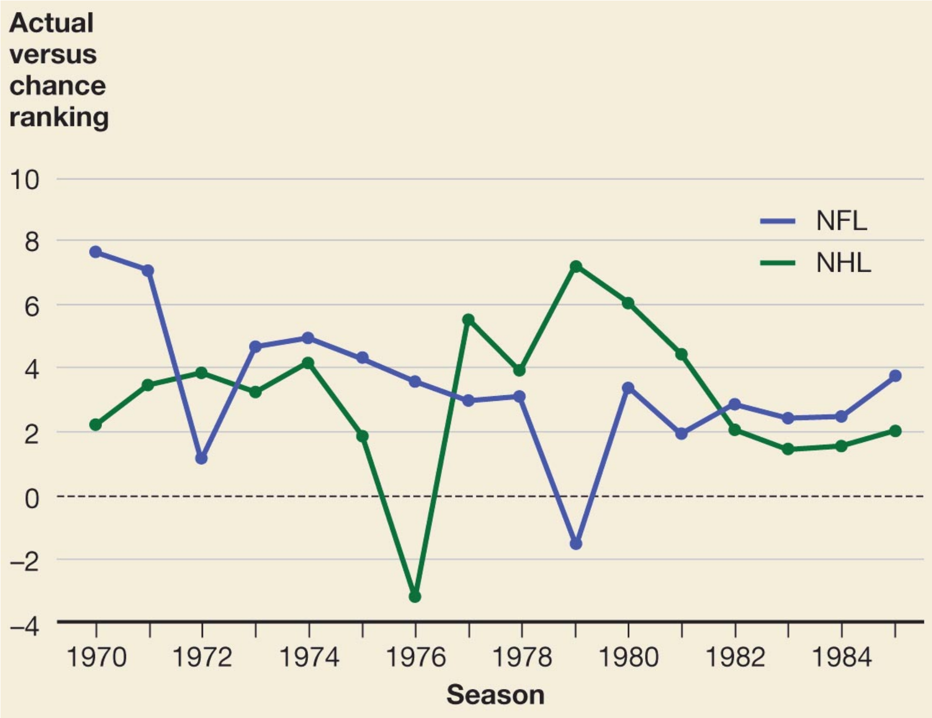
As pronounced as this tendency might be, however, it can’ t predict whether wearing black actually causes players to be more aggressive. There are two other possibilities. First, because of some negative stereotypes involving the color black (such as black being the typical dress of movie villains), players in black uniforms may look more intimidating even if they play no differently than players on teams who aren’ t wearing black. Thus, players in black uniforms may be more likely than others to be penalized for marginal infractions. Second, the finding may simply be a selection effect; that is, the management of certain teams, believing that aggressiveness pays off in victories, may both recruit particularly aggressive players and, incidentally, give them black uniforms to foster an aggressive image.

The latter interpretation, however, can be ruled out. By a convenient twist of fate, several teams switched uniforms from other colors to black during the period under investigation, and all experienced a corresponding increase in penalties. One team, the NHL’ s Pittsburgh Penguins, changed uniform colors in the middle of a season, so the switch wasn’ t accompanied by any changes in players, coaches, or front-office personnel. Nevertheless, the Penguins averaged 8 penalty minutes in the blue uniforms they wore before the switch and 12 penalty minutes in the black uniforms they wore after—a 50 percent increase.

Follow-up laboratory experiments have provided support for both perceived aggressiveness and actual aggressiveness of players dressed in black. Thus, the tendency for black-uniformed teams to draw so many penalties appears to be the joint effect of a bias on the part of referees and a tendency for players wearing black to act more aggressively (M. G. Frank & Gilovich, 1988).

But does wearing black always make people more aggressive? Probably not. The effect seems to be limited to contexts that are already associated with confrontation and aggression. The black clothing worn by Catholic clerics and Hasidic Jews, for example, may not make them any more aggressive, but the black shirts worn by Hitler’ s SS might very well have contributed to their brutality.

(A)



(B)

FIGURE 13.4 **Uniform Color and Aggression** (A) The Pittsburgh Steelers, wearing black uniforms, were known for their aggressive play. (B) Points on this

graph of penalty records represent the difference between the average ranking of the black-uniformed teams and the average to be expected based on chance alone (dotted horizontal line at 0). Source: Adapted from M. G. Frank & Gilovich, 1988.

Dehumanization

Various kinds of aggression, from genocide to war to bullying, often go hand-in-hand with a particularly dangerous construal process known as dehumanization: the attribution of nonhuman characteristics to other people (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). During the eighteenth-century slave trade, Europeans referred to the Africans they captured, sold, and killed as “brutes” and “beasts.” The Nazis described Jews as “lice.” During the Rwandan genocide, the Hutus referred to the Tutsis as “cockroaches.” Hate crimes against gay men are often justified with dehumanizing rhetoric. The homeless or unhoused—one of the fastest-growing targets of violent hate crimes—are frequently dehumanized as animals. You might hear a political pundit refer to an “infestation” of undocumented immigrants (who are further dehumanized by being referred to as “illegals” or “aliens”).

Dehumanization can unleash aggression for the simple reason that it’s easier to harm people when they seem less human and less like ourselves. For example, dehumanization plays a role in bullying (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014) and in some people’s acceptance of police violence against African Americans (Goff et al., 2008). In a study of sexual violence, Laurie Rudman and Kris Mescher (2012) identified men who were more likely to dehumanize women according to how quickly they paired the concept of “woman” with concepts such as “animal” and “instinct.” Men who were more likely to dehumanize women in this way were also more likely to report that they would harass women sexually, that they would force a woman to have sex if no one would ever find out about it, and that women on occasion deserve to be raped.

One factor that increases the likelihood of dehumanization is loyalty to valued social groups. When we feel strongly committed to a group, whether a political party, an ethnic group, or a sports team, we are more disposed to dehumanize outgroup members. In one survey of over 180 groups in developing countries, groups characterized by powerful ingroup loyalty and a strong sense of group identity were more likely to dehumanize other groups and to act in violent fashion against them (T. R. Cohen, Montoya, & Insko, 2006).

Suspect
Elliot Rodger
DOB:
7/24/1991
Sig Sauer
P226

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SHOOTING SPREES Elliot Rodger killed 6 people and injured 14 more near the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara. His violence was fueled by a hatred of women and disgust at interracial couples.

Sadly, even rather benign feelings of social connection can increase the likelihood of dehumanizing others. Although feeling socially connected brings us closer to people within our group, it can create greater distance from those who are different from us, making dehumanization more likely. In one study guided by this idea, students who were asked to recall a time when they felt connected to another person attributed fewer humanlike mental states, such as empathy and moral concern, to outgroups such as wealthy or poor people (Waytz & Epley, 2012). In a clever extension of this work, when participants reported their attitudes while sitting next to a friend (thus feeling socially connected) as opposed to sitting next to a stranger, they were more likely to dehumanize non–U.S. citizens who were detained for security reasons and to more strongly endorse forms of torture such as waterboarding and the application of electric shock (Waytz & Epley, 2012).

Distancing From the Causes of Aggression

How might we avoid the pernicious tendencies associated with anger and dehumanization? One recommendation comes from the work of Ethan Kross and Ozlem Ayduk (2017), who propose that getting some distance from anger makes people more peaceful in contexts that might otherwise trigger aggression. Any experience of anger can be recalled from the original point of view, as it was initially experienced, or from a distance (Ayduk & Kross, 2008). To view our anger from a distance, we could, for example, think of the frustrating event as just one moment in time, as a single episode within a much longer relationship, or even as if it were part of a movie or novel. Construing potentially angering situations in such ways allows us to attain some distance from our feelings, and research suggests that doing so is a good thing.

In one study, participants were asked to think about an incident that had made them angry (Ayduk & Kross, 2008). Half of them were told to immerse themselves in the experience and vividly feel it in the present moment. The other half were told to look at the experience from a distance, as if they were watching themselves in a movie. Those participants who distanced themselves from their anger showed less fight-or-flight increases in blood pressure and reported a greater sense of calm. In a similar vein, when people look at conflicts from a more distant perspective by imagining what the situation will be like a year from now (as opposed to taking an immersed, here-and-now point of view), they tend to blame others less and are more forgiving (Hyunh, Yang, & Grossmann, 2016).

Remarkably, when asking people why they are upset, referring to them in the third person rather than the second person evokes less negative emotion. For example, if we ask Jamie, “Why are you upset?” Jamie will experience more negative emotion than if we ask, “Why is Jamie upset?” (Grossmann & Kross, 2014). Both experience and research indicate that it’s easier for people to reason calmly about other people’s problems than about their own. When people use their own names to think about themselves, it prompts them to take an observer’s perspective—to think about themselves as though they were someone else (albeit another person whose inner thoughts and feelings they have privileged access to). This practice often provides them with the psychological distance needed to calmly reason through stressful situations and come up with wiser solutions.

LOOKING BACK

People’s construals of situations are crucial in determining whether they act aggressively. When any kind of stimulus triggers anger, we’re more likely to act aggressively. Our tendency to dehumanize others can fuel aggression. We aren’t prisoners of such hostile construals, however. When we step back and look at what’s making us angry from a distance, we become calmer and less hostile.

Glossary

dehumanization

The attribution of nonhuman characteristics and denial of human qualities to groups (generally to groups other than one’s own).

Culture and Aggression

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe what honor is, and review the evidence that a culture of honor is associated with certain kinds of aggression.
- Discuss some of the cultural forces that make sexual aggression against women more likely.

Anthropologists have long noted dramatic cultural variations in the expression of aggression. People in some cultures have been observed to be unusually kind, peaceful, and cooperative. Alaskan Inuits, for example, have been described as rarely expressing anger or aggression and as remarkably kind in their interactions with others. People in other cultures have been portrayed as violent, belligerent, and aggressive. Among the Yanomami, who live in the Amazon region, aggression is encouraged in children, intratribal fighting with spears and knives is a weekly source of injury and death, and rape and war are considered an intrinsic part of human nature (Chagnon, 1997). Their fitting name for themselves is “the fierce people.”

(A)

(B)

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN AGGRESSIVE EXPRESSION (A) In some cultures, aggression is much less common at every age of development, as in Japan. (B) The Yanomami encourage aggression in their children and are known for their violent raids against their enemies.

These qualitative observations are backed up by quantitative data: There are notable cultural variations in every kind of aggression, including bullying, assault, murder, and rape. For example, the homicide rate in the United States is higher than that of most Western European countries, 4 times higher than that of France and the United Kingdom, and 10 to 20 times higher than that of China and Japan (Index Mundi, 2019; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019).

What accounts for such variation? A cultural perspective holds that certain values and habitual ways of construing the self and others make members of some cultures more aggressive and violent than others. Social psychologists have developed imaginative ways of examining cultural differences in aggressive behavior in the laboratory to better understand them.

The Culture of Honor

In a culture of honor, which is prevalent in the U.S. South (see Chapter 2), men tend to be especially concerned with their reputation for toughness, machismo, and willingness and ability to avenge a wrong or insult. These concerns give rise to firm rules of politeness and other ways people recognize the honor of others, thus lending stability to social relationships and reducing the risk of violence. The downside of the concern with honor is that it makes people particularly sensitive to slights and insults, thereby leading them to respond with violence to protect or reestablish their honor.

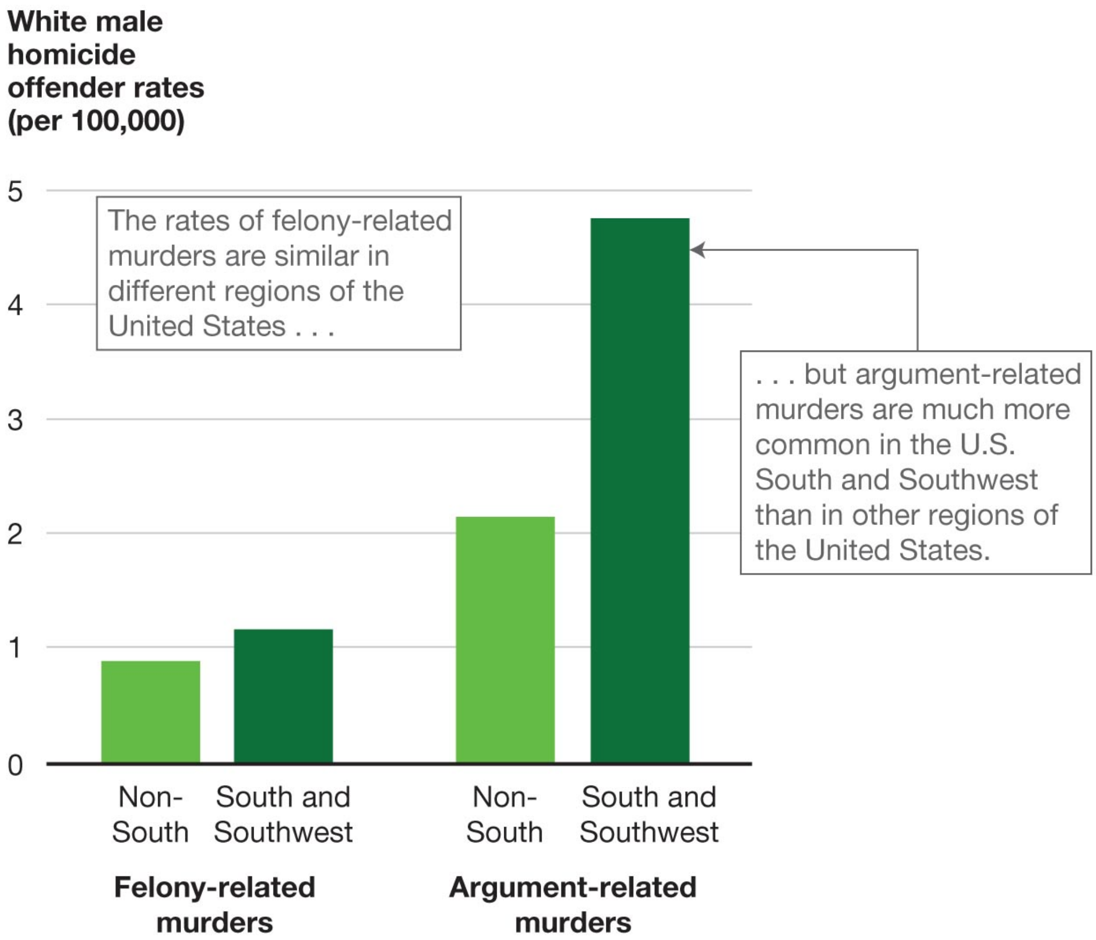


FIGURE 13.5 **HOMICIDE AND THE CULTURE OF HONOR** Argument-related homicide rates point to a sensitivity to slights and insults that characterizes a culture of honor in the South and Southwest. Source: Adapted from Nisbett & Cohen, 1996, p. 21; based on data from Fox & Pierce, 1987.

As you’ll recall from Chapter 2, Richard Nisbett and Dov Cohen (1996) have shown that when their honor is slighted, Southern men are more likely than Northern men to respond with aggression. In archival research, Nisbett and his colleagues found that murders in the context of another felony such as robbery were about equally common in the North, South, and Southwest, but murders that occurred as a result of an argument or perceived insult were far more common in the South and Southwest than in the North (**Figure 13.5**).

To examine participants’ sensitivity to slights and insults, Cohen and his colleagues exposed Southern and Northern White men to an insult in the context of a laboratory study. An accomplice of the experimenter bumped into each participant and called him an “asshole” (Cohen et al., 1996). Insulted participants from Southern states showed more anger in their facial expressions and higher levels of testosterone and cortisone than did insulted Northerners. Following the insult, the Southerners shook another person’s hand more firmly and refused to move out of the way of an imposing confederate walking toward them down a narrow hallway. Additionally, in a later field experiment, Cohen and Nisbett (1997) found that some Southern employers actually expressed a good deal of warmth toward a potential job applicant who confessed to having been convicted of manslaughter after defending his honor.

Where did this regional difference in the importance attached to honor come from? Why is honor-related homicide more common in the South? Could it just be the hot weather? That explanation isn’t supported, because honor-related homicides are actually more common in the relatively cool mountain regions of the South (Kentucky, Arkansas) than in the relatively hot agricultural lowlands (Mississippi, Alabama). Could it be the brutal history of slavery? Again, probably not, and for the same geographical reason: Homicide is more common in the highlands, where slavery was relatively uncommon, than in the lowlands, where slavery was ubiquitous.

Nisbett and Cohen (1996) argue that the culture of honor in the South is a variant of a cultural perspective found worldwide among people who earn their living by herding animals. Herders are susceptible to losing their entire wealth in an instant if someone steals their cows, pigs, or sheep. Farmers, in contrast, are susceptible to no such rapid and catastrophic loss, at least not at the hands of another person. The vulnerability of the herders means that they have to develop a tough exterior and make it clear that they’re willing to take a stand against the slightest threat, even an insult or a joke at their expense. This difference fits the pattern of violence in the United States: The North was founded primarily by farmers from England, Germany, and the Netherlands, whereas the South was founded primarily by Scottish and Irish settlers (and especially the Scotch-Irish of Northern Ireland). These Celtic peoples had herded, rather than farmed, since prehistoric times. Thus, the people in the Southern highlands, where the herding culture continued to be a major economic activity until quite recently, were more likely to be violent than those in the lowlands, where settlers took advantage of the rich soil to become farmers.

Culture and Sexual Violence

In 1990, the Nobel Prize–winning economist Amartya Sen estimated that there were 100 million missing women in the world (Sen, 1990). Women, holding constant their country of origin and class background, are more likely to enjoy a longer life expectancy than men, so any given population should include more women than men. But in some countries, particularly in those where women have less status than men, women are underrepresented in the population because of patterns of negligence and violence that have caused many women to die prematurely—hence the estimate of “missing” women (Kristof & WuDunn, 2009).

In certain countries, for example, female infanticide is practiced. Parents are also less likely to immunize their daughters than their sons or to take their daughters to the hospital when they are sick. As a result, girls are more likely to die early deaths from preventable or curable sicknesses. Bride burning, the practice of punishing a young woman for her family’s failure to confer a sufficient dowry on the groom’s family in marriage, claims the lives of several thousand young women in India every year. The trafficking of young girls into a life of prostitution, which occurs in many societies, claims the lives of thousands of girls each year, some as young as age 8. Some of these girls are sold by their own families.

RAPE IS A COMMON METHOD OF VIOLENCE DURING WAR Maomi Thomas, pictured here at age 16, was raped amid the violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Less deadly forms of sexual aggression are common in virtually every country. For example, in the United States, 50 – 80 percent of women have been sexually harassed, having been stalked, catcalled, or made the target of obscene comments at work or over the phone (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). Moreover, approximately 10 – 20 percent of adolescent and young-adult women report having been sexually assaulted by someone they were dating (Black et al., 2011), and one in every five women reports that they have been raped (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015).

FOOTBALL IS A PRIVILEGE SAFETY IS A HUMAN RIGHT
BOYS WILL BE ~~BOYS~~ HELD ACCOUNTABLE
97% of RAPISTS walk free Believe Survivors
THINK OF HER FUTURE
WE WILL BELIEVE YOU
SILENCE SUPPORTS THE

SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS The continuing prevalence of sexual violence prompted a federal investigation of 55 American universities and colleges for failing to take appropriate measures in responding to sexual attacks on campus.

One of the most disturbing and common acts of violence against women is rape, the coercive forcing of sex by one person (almost always male) on another (typically a female). Men often rape as an instrument of terror during war, as was the case in the genocides in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Darfur. But acts of rape aren’t limited to the circumstances of war. According to the organization UN Women (2011), sexual violence and rape are alarmingly common. A survey of 86 countries found that, on average, about 20 percent of women report having experienced sexual violence or rape in a romantic relationship at some time in their lives. In some countries, this rarely happens; for example, only 2.7 percent of women in Cambodia reported such an experience. In other countries, the statistics are staggering; in Ethiopia, 58.6 percent of women reported having experienced at least one episode of sexual violence in an intimate relationship. Sexual violence has enormous long-term costs. Compared with women who haven’t been traumatized by sexual violence, women who have are twice as likely to experience major episodes of depression and are more likely to commit suicide (Krahé, 2017).

#MeToo
survivors' march
Nov 12th 10am-3pm
Hollywood & Highland
bit.ly/metoomarch
#MeToo
Stronger Together
TELL SOMEBODY
IT HAPPENED TO
#METOO
#ME TOO
me too
#MeToo
survivors' march

THE ME TOO MOVEMENT In response to the persistence of sexual harassment in every work context, women shared stories and engaged in protests organized around the #MeToo hashtag.

What makes rape more prevalent in certain cultures than in others? And how can such a question be tackled empirically? Peggy Reeves Sanday (1981, 1997) relied on archival records to study the characteristics of what might be called a “culture of rape.” She surveyed historical and anthropological descriptions of 156 cultures dating back to 1750 BCE and continuing to the 1960s. Looking carefully for references to rape in these accounts, Sanday identified what she called rape-prone cultures. In these cultures—which made up 18 percent of the cultures Sanday studied—men used rape as an act of war against enemy women; as a ritual act, such as part of a wedding ceremony or an adolescent male's rite of passage to adulthood; or as a threat against women to keep them subservient to men. In 35 percent of the other cultures, rape was present or observed but not used in such ritualistic and systematic ways. And we note, sadly, that it would be no surprise if these figures actually underestimated the prevalence of rape-proneness across cultures. They are based largely on anthropologists' observations, and rape is one of the most difficult acts to observe and a taboo subject in many cultures.

The cultures in which rape was particularly prevalent were defined by two qualities. First, rape-prone cultures were more likely to have high levels of violence generally, a history of frequent warfare, and an emphasis on machismo and male toughness. Second, in keeping with the idea that rape is a means of subordinating women, rape was more prevalent in cultures in which stereotypes and biases relegated women to a lower status in society. In rape-prone cultures, women were more likely to be prevented from receiving an education and participating in political decision making. Where rape was uncommon, women were more empowered and more likely to be granted equal status with men. Additionally, studies find that with rising economic gender equality, violence perpetrated by romantic partners against women declines (Archer, 2006).

GENDER EQUALITY IN A RAPE-FREE CULTURE The Mbuti Pygmies, in the Congo region of Africa, are known for their low levels of violence against women.

Consider the Mbuti Pygmies, an Indigenous group in the Congo region of Africa, as an illustration of these findings (Turnbull, 1965). The Mbuti Pygmies are a (reportedly) nearly rape-free society, and there is minimal interpersonal violence and fighting. This culture attaches great prestige to the raising of children and values women’s contributions to group well-being. Though women and men assume different duties, they have equal standing, and women and men participate equally in political decision making.

LOOKING BACK

Cultures differ greatly in their propensity for aggression. Members of cultures of honor, which frequently were herding cultures in the past, are more inclined to commit violence when insulted. Cultures that are prone to rape are characteristically those that devalue women and have extreme gender inequality.

Glossary

culture of honor	A culture defined by its members’ strong concerns about their own and others’ reputations, leading to sensitivity to insults and a willingness to use violence to avenge any perceived slight.
rape-prone culture	A culture in which rape tends to be used as an act of war against enemy women, as a ritual act, or as a threat against women to keep them subservient to men.

Evolution and Aggression

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Define inclusive fitness and discuss how it explains certain patterns of violence within families.
- Explain why men might have evolved to be more aggressive than women.

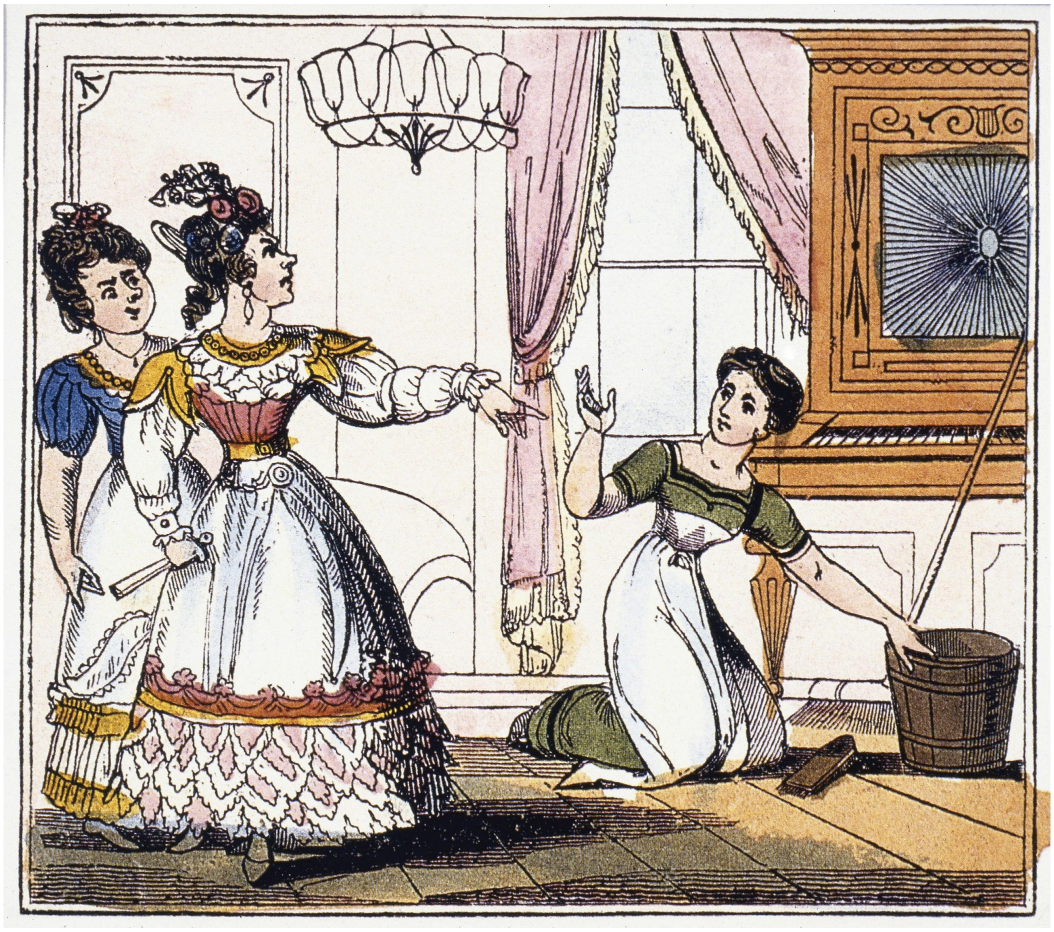
For many people, the word *evolution* brings to mind a violent struggle for survival and the opportunity to reproduce—the “nature red in tooth and claw,” to quote from Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s poem “In Memoriam.” As we’ve emphasized in this book, evolutionary theory is more than just a theory of competition and violence; it has helped illuminate all manner of social behaviors from romantic attraction to empathic concern for others. Nevertheless, an evolutionary perspective has also proved helpful in understanding some of the origins of aggression.

Violence in Stepfamilies

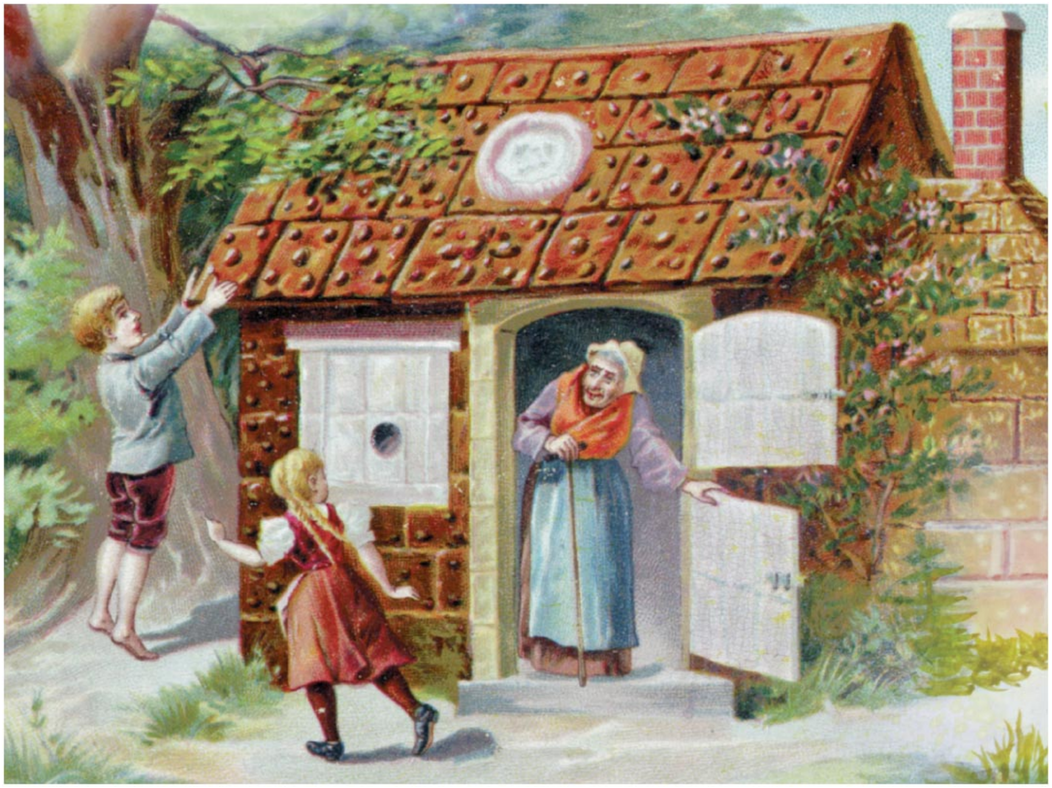
Literature is full of tales of wicked stepparents who abuse their stepchildren. In the animal kingdom, “step-relations” seem similarly prone to violence. To take one example, when male lions acquire a new mate, they routinely kill that female’s cubs from her prior matings. Evolutionary psychologists Margo Wilson and Martin Daly suggest that these tendencies in our mammalian relatives have left their trace in human nature (Daly & Wilson, 1996; Wilson, Daly, & Weghorst, 1980).

Natural selection, Daly and Wilson maintain, rewards those parents who devote resources to their own offspring. Behaviors related to parental care, from filial love to breast-feeding, assist the survival of one’s own offspring, thereby increasing inclusive fitness—that is, an individual’s own survival plus that of their children and other offspring who carry the individual’s genes. But parental care is costly, as any parent knows; it requires time, effort, and material resources. It’s been estimated that hunter-gatherers typically don’t become net contributors of food and other resources until around the age of 21. (Your parents should be so lucky!) In evolutionary terms, parental expenditures are offset by the gains of having offspring—namely, the survival of their genes. Stepparents, however, since they don’t share genes with their stepchildren, incur the same costs with no enhancement of their inclusive fitness.

Survey results consistently reveal that relations between stepparents and stepchildren tend to be more distant and conflicted, as well as less committed and satisfying, than relationships between parents and their genetic offspring (Hobart, 1991). Crime statistics are even more sobering. Daly and Wilson (1996) found that in the United States, children who are younger than age 2 are 100 times more likely to be abused to the point of death by stepparents than by genetic parents, and in Canada, they are 70 times more likely to be killed by stepparents than by genetic parents. These findings hold, it’s important to note, even when controlling for the family’s economic circumstances, age of the mother, length of time the couple has lived together, and number of children in the home (for a recent summary, see Debowska, Hales, & Boduszek, 2020). In a study of a South American hunter-gatherer society, 43 percent of children raised by a mother and stepfather died before their 15th birthday; that’s more than twice the rate of death (19 percent) of children raised by two genetic parents. (This statistic doesn’t imply that the stepchildren were killed but that, at the very least, they were more likely to have been denied resources, such as food and physical care, that were made available to genetic offspring.)



(A)



(B)

MISTREATED STEPCHILDREN Literature and fairy tales abound with tales of stepchildren treated badly by their stepmothers. (A) Cinderella becomes the scullery maid for her stepmother and stepsisters. (B) Hansel and Gretel are sent out to die in the forest at the urging of their stepmother.

Gender and Aggression

When we hear about school shootings or teen violence or when we read about rape or genocide, it’ s almost always true that these acts of aggression are committed by young men. Physical aggression is, in fact, from early childhood to old age, among the most marked and consistent gender differences in behavior (Biglan et al., 2019). Studies from around the world find that boys are more aggressive than girls by the age of 2 (Archer, 2009), and as they develop they are more likely to be defiant in classrooms, to be bullies on the playground, and to fight and engage in delinquent behavior. As adults, men are much more likely than women to assault others, murder, and rape, accounting for 80 to 90 percent of incidents involving these forms of extreme aggression (Biglan et al., 2019). Historically, it has been almost exclusively men who have fought wars. Men are also overwhelmingly the victims of violence. For example, men are 20 times as likely to kill other men as women are to kill other women (Daly & Wilson, 1988).

Bling
Bling

A SCENE FROM THE MOVIE *MEAN GIRLS* Although men commit most acts of physical aggression, women are more likely to engage in relational or emotional aggression.

Women, of course, are also aggressive, but in different ways. Women seem to exceed men in what’s known as relational aggression: They are more likely to gossip, form alliances, and practice exclusion and social rejection to hurt others (Coie et al., 1999; Dodge & Schwartz, 1997; McFayden-Ketchum et al., 1996). Many readers will remember with a wince the vicious ways girls can behave toward one another in middle school, talking behind people's backs and tarnishing reputations. Adolescent girls are also more likely than adolescent boys to spread malicious rumors online (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Obviously, this kind of aggression can be extremely hurtful.

What is one to make of these striking gender differences in physical violence? Why are men so much more physically aggressive than women? Evolutionary psychologists, including John Archer, understand these differences in terms of access to reproductive opportunities (Archer, 2009; Daly & Wilson, 1988). Their theorizing builds on the concept of parental investment (see Chapter 1). According to this thinking, women invest more in their offspring than men and thus are less likely to desert their offspring and seek other reproductive opportunities. Men, in contrast, are evolutionarily freer to go outside the primary relationship and compete with other men for mating opportunities. Within this competition, high-status men are more successful than low-status men in terms of reproductive success, or number of offspring. By contrast, reproductively healthy women who want to pass on their genes are, almost without exception, able to do so and therefore don't have the same need to be physically aggressive.

BOX 13.3

FOCUS ON GENES AND ENVIRONMENT

Nature or Nurture? It's Both

Many biological factors predispose people to act aggressively, ranging from an individual’s level of testosterone to the density of neural connections in the frontal lobes (H. White, 1997; Yudko et al., 1997). Research by Avshalom Caspi, Terrie Moffitt, and their colleagues indicates that aggression might best be thought of as the interaction of situational factors and genetically based individual differences (Caspi et al., 2002). They tested for two forms of the monoamine oxidase A (MAOA) gene. Monoamine oxidase is an enzyme that metabolizes certain neurotransmitters in the synapses in the brain, allowing for smooth communication between neurons. In studies of nonhuman species such as rats, individuals with a short form of the MAOA gene have been shown to be more aggressive, suggesting that this version of the gene might also predict aggressive behavior in humans. Caspi and his colleagues identified men with this short form of the gene (37 percent of their sample) and those with the long form of the gene. To examine the influence of situational factors, the investigators also identified men who had or hadn’t been mistreated by their parents as children—one of the most potent factors in childhood that is associated with violent behavior in adulthood.

Overall, the short MAOA gene alone didn’t affect whether the boys committed violent crimes (rape, assault, robbery) by age 26. This finding suggests that a genetic predisposition, by itself, doesn’t determine whether an individual will engage in aggression. But the combination of the short form of the MAOA gene *and* a family environment of physical abuse led boys to be 3 times more likely to have been convicted of a violent crime by age 26 than the boys who had the defective gene but had *not* been mistreated. Although those with the gene for low MAOA activity who had also suffered mistreatment were only 12 percent of the population in the study, they were responsible for 44 percent of the group’s convictions for violent crime. The important lesson of this telling study is that nature requires nurture to shape behavior.

Throughout evolutionary history, this basic difference in reproductive opportunities led males to evolve characteristics and strategies for outcompeting other males for mates. Physical aggression is one such strategy, and it serves males well in competing with other males (and in other tendencies desirable to potential mates, such as the ability to provide protection). Around the world, men are 7.6 percent taller than women, 25 percent heavier, and 1.5 times physically stronger (Archer, 2009). Male physical prowess evolved for aggressive encounters with other men, and indeed, today bigger men tend to engage in aggressive behaviors more frequently (DeWall et al., 2010).

According to evolutionary psychologists, nonverbal signals of size and strength evolved to enable men to establish their rank in relation to other men in status hierarchies. Cues of physical strength include a broader chin, a deeper voice (which correlates with physical size), and even facial hair—all of which have evolved, the thinking goes, for men to signal strength to other males, allowing them in turn to enjoy elevated status and preferential access to mating opportunities (Archer, 2009; J. T. Cheng et al., 2016).

The evolutionary approach helps explain the increases in muscle mass, facial hair, and other signs of physical development during puberty in young men, which accompany shifting levels of testosterone. Higher levels of testosterone are associated with higher levels of aggression. For example, adolescents with criminal records have higher levels of testosterone than college students with no criminal records do

(Banks & Dabbs, 1996), and members of rowdier fraternities have higher testosterone levels than members of more responsible fraternities do (Dabbs, 2000). Social psychologists have also found that testosterone promotes status-related behaviors in competitive settings (P. H. Mehta & Josephs, 2010). Two general patterns of results suggest that testosterone probably served men well in the competition for mates (P. H. Mehta et al., 2015; Schultheiss, 2013). First, men who have higher levels of testosterone tend to exhibit more dominant, assertive behaviors that presumably help them achieve higher status. (In women, the hormone estradiol, which converts to testosterone in the body, has a similar effect.) Second, men who care a lot about power and status show increased testosterone (in women, increased estradiol) after winning competitions.

EVOLUTIONARY THEORY AND PHYSICAL APPEARANCE According to evolutionary theorists, someone like Conor McGregor, the famous Irish mixed martial artist, could be expected, on the basis of his physical appearance, to have many sexual partners.

Some cultural theorists have a different take on why men are more prone to aggressive behavior. Within this school of thought, men are socialized according to norms and into roles that encourage physical aggressiveness. Parents, teachers, media sources, and social institutions systematically (but often unwittingly) cultivate more aggressive tendencies in men. Consider, for example, how young boys are treated from the earliest stages of life. When parents see a video of an infant looking startled, the parents are more likely to say that the infant is angry if it’s a boy. If the same infant is said to be a girl, the parents say that the infant is fearful (Condry & Condry, 1976). Mothers talk more about emotions with their daughters than with their sons, and such conversations may cultivate greater empathy in women (Fivush, 1991). The one emotion mothers don’t tend to talk more about with their daughters is anger, which mothers are more likely to mention in labeling the emotions of their sons. Thus, starting very early in life, anger and aggressive reactions are made more salient to young boys than to young girls. Given that anger is a primary determinant of aggression, this socialization process might account for at least some of the gender differences we’re discussing.

Combining the evolutionary and cultural approaches to male aggression, Jennifer Bosson and Joseph Vandello have proposed that a man’s gender identity is significantly tied up in his physical strength, toughness, and fierceness. However, according to their precarious manhood hypothesis, many factors—competition, status contests, being the target of male violence, worsening economic conditions, the loss of a job—can render a man’s gender identity relatively uncertain and more vulnerable (Vandello & Bosson, 2013).

Empirical studies show that the notion of precarious manhood is widely accepted (Bosson & Vandello, 2011). In one study, for example, participants read proverbs that portrayed the insecure nature of manhood (“manhood is hard won and easily lost”) or the same proverbs phrased to focus on the uncertain nature of womanhood (“womanhood is hard won but easily lost”). Participants more often endorsed the proverbs portraying precarious manhood.

The precarious manhood hypothesis posits further that men, aware of their more vulnerable gender identity, should be more sensitive to threats to their manhood and thus more likely to resort to risky and often aggressive behaviors to prove themselves. For some readers this may be reminiscent of high school bravado—the dangerous acts young men routinely engage in, challenging each other physically, provoking fights, climbing water towers, driving recklessly. (We’ve been told by physicians in the Southwest that the people who show up in hospitals with rattlesnake bites are most likely to be inebriated young men!) In one study, men first either braided a bunch of ropes or braided the hair of a wig, the latter being a more feminine task and a threat to stereotypical notions of masculinity (Bosson & Vandello, 2011). All participants then put on boxing gloves and struck a punching bag. Men who had braided hair hit the bag much harder than those who had braided ropes.

Research findings also suggest a link between precarious manhood and violence against gay people (here, too, almost exclusively perpetrated by men). In laboratory studies, men whose manhood has been threatened express more distance from gay people and greater aggression toward them (Bosson & Vandello, 2011).

LOOKING BACK

Evolutionary theory predicts that stepparents are more likely than genetic parents to behave in violent ways toward children, and they are. Males tend to be more aggressive than females partly because such behavior can help them attain status and gain access to females. Females tend to be more relationally or emotionally aggressive than males. Cultural theorists believe that socialization processes contribute to gender differences in aggression. Studies on precarious manhood find that threats to the sense of manhood can trigger aggression in men.

Glossary

inclusive fitness	According to evolutionary theory, an individual’s reproductive success, which ensures the transmission of an individual’s genes to future generations.
precarious manhood hypothesis	The idea that a man’s gender identity, which significantly involves strength and toughness, may be lost under various conditions and that such a loss can trigger aggressive behavior.

Conflict and Peacemaking

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe how misconstrual can polarize conflict.
- Define simplistic and complex reasoning and explain how they escalate or reduce conflict between nations.

On the evening of April 6, 1994, Jean-Baptiste and Odette, Rwandan husband-and-wife physicians, were enjoying drinks with a friend while listening to the radio. Just after 8 p.m., they heard that the plane carrying Rwanda’s president Juvénal Habyarimana, a Hutu, had been shot down near Kigali, Rwanda’s capital. Odette knew there was going to be trouble. Her husband was a Hutu, like the president, but Odette was a Tutsi. Though the Tutsis and Hutus share a language, religion, and a history of living together, Odette had witnessed several massacres of her people at the hands of the Hutus. She was worried that the killing of the president would fuel anti-Tutsi sentiment among the majority Hutus.

Tragically, she proved to be right. In the 100 days that followed the incident, Hutus would massacre approximately 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus (Gourevitch, 1998). Militiamen known as the *Interahamwe* set up roadblocks throughout Rwanda, pulled Tutsis from their cars, and killed them. In small Rwandan towns, Hutus turned on their Tutsi neighbors, brutally killing them with machetes. Hutu schoolteachers massacred their Tutsi students. Even Tutsis taking sanctuary in churches were slaughtered. Throughout the rolling hills of Rwanda, flocks of crows and buzzards flew above areas where massacres had taken place.

(A)

(B)

GENOCIDE In addition to the mass murders by the Nazis, genocide has also occurred in the former Yugoslavia, in Cambodia, in Rwanda, and in Sudan, among other places. (A) An open grave of 10,000 naked bodies was found at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp when the British liberated the camp in April 1945. (B) A church in Nitarama, Rwanda, holding the remains of 400 Tutsis killed by the Hutu *Interahamwe* was discovered by a United Nations team in September 1994.

In the aftermath of this genocide, Rwandans went through a process of reconciliation, following principles similar to those used in post-apartheid South Africa to attempt to redress the racial injustices of that country’s past. In informal “truth and reconciliation” gatherings in Rwandan villages, Tutsis were given a public arena to air their grief and rage. Hutu perpetrators apologized to the relatives of their victims. Formal court proceedings convicted several Hutu leaders for their roles in the genocide. By most accounts, Rwanda is today a stable and peaceful society. Although tensions and bitterness persist, levels of aggression and conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis are low.

The story of Rwanda is a familiar one in the history of humanity, a story of how quickly people can transition from relative peace to violent conflict and often (but not always) back to peace again. Now we consider what social psychology has to say about transitions between conflict and peacemaking, highlighting the power of construal.

Misperception and Polarization

The frenzied rush to genocide in Rwanda was stirred by a manifesto known as the Hutu Ten Commandments, which was published in a widely read magazine, *Kangura*, and broadcast by local radio stations. The Hutu Ten Commandments warned of the threat posed by the Tutsis: Tutsi women were secret agents bent on Hutu demise; Hutu men who married or employed Tutsi women were traitors; Hutus who did business with Tutsis were enemies of the Hutu people. These and other rumors and fears led Hutus to form deadly misperceptions about the Tutsis that helped fuel the genocide. Such misperceptions are commonly promoted in wartime propaganda and in the rhetoric that accompanies international crises and serves to justify aggression.

As a result of these misperceptions, adversaries will come to construe their conflict as a fight between good and evil (Bar-Tal, 1990). They come to think of their own group as moral and good and the other side as immoral and evil (Brewer & Kramer, 1985). Adversaries routinely assume that their opponents' interests are the exact opposite of their own (Plous, 1985). In the political arena, opposing partisans will tend to see their party as patriotic and their opponents as lacking in patriotism (Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012).

These kinds of construals fuel social conflict in at least two ways. First, they lead people to believe that conflicts are polarized, that on all sorts of issues people fall into one of two opposing camps. This tendency causes people to overlook the common ground they so often share, even with political adversaries. Lee Ross and his colleagues surveyed people with opposing views on such issues as abortion and the death penalty as well as enemies embroiled in geopolitical conflicts like those in Northern Ireland and the Middle East (L. Ross & Ward, 1995). In these studies, members of both sides reported on their own attitudes and estimated the attitudes of their opponents (R. J. Robinson et al., 1995). The researchers found that group members systematically overestimated the extremity of their opponents' attitudes; that is, they assumed that the other side was made up of fanatical extremists and that the conflict was polarized, when in fact many people on the other side were relatively moderate in their convictions.

Survey data from the past 30 years consistently find that people in the United States overestimate the differences between Republicans and Democrats (Westfall et al., 2015). This tendency to polarize is particularly true for people who hold more extreme political views (Van Boven, Judd, & Sherman, 2012). The media have become more polarized as well, as evidenced by the rise of negative campaigning and the move away from news shows that cover both sides of an issue to opinion-based cable programs that masquerade as “news” but in reality advocate one ideological perspective (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012).

The second problematic outcome of misconstruing one’s opponents is a bias known as reactive devaluation, the tendency of opposing sides to attach little value to any offer made by their counterpart in a negotiation. Even when one side makes a concession, the proposal may be perceived by the other side as not being favorable to them. In other words: “You’re my enemy, so if you made this proposal, it must not be in my interests or morally sound.” To explore this tendency, Lee Ross and Constance Stillinger (1991) measured student protesters’ attitudes toward their university’s proposal regarding its investments in companies doing business in South Africa during the height of student protests against apartheid in the 1980s. Before the university adopted the plan, when students were considering its merits in the abstract, the students felt it was a significant and positive move. But after the plan was adopted, students evaluated it much less favorably. The mere fact that “the other side” (the university administration) had adopted the plan was enough to make students regard it with suspicion. When parties to a conflict react in this way, it can be difficult to find common ground and make progress in negotiations.

Simplistic Reasoning and Rhetoric

In the heat of conflict, group members are prone to perceive their opponents as extremist and their actions as adversarial. Psychologist Phil Tetlock (1981) has found that this kind of simplistic reasoning translates into simplistic rhetoric as well, which in turn can escalate conflicts.

Tetlock notes that adversaries can reason and speak to each other in either a relatively complex or a relatively simple fashion. The complexity (or simplicity) of a position is defined by two qualities: (1) the level of differentiation, or the number of ideas in the position, and (2) the level of integration, or the connections drawn among the different ideas. More complex rhetoric involves many ideas, even opposing ones, and draws many connections between them. Simpler positions involve fewer ideas and few connections between them. For example, a complex position either for or against universal basic income, which would provide every citizen with a liveable income, would involve many ideas (e.g., about fairness, tax burdens, reducing poverty, health care savings, reducing hunger, educational achievement) and connections among these ideas (e.g., how reductions in poverty would produce health care savings).

How does the complexity or simplicity of reasoning influence conflict and peacemaking? To answer this question, Tetlock and his colleagues coded the complexity of politicians’ reasoning from their speeches and interviews (Tetlock, 1981). They found that politicians speak in a more simplistic and extreme manner when combating opponents and wooing potential voters on the campaign trail, but their speech becomes more complex once they are elected and are dealing with the give-and-take of policy making. In another study, researchers examined the complexity of political leaders’ rhetoric during two crises: the build-up to World War I in 1914 and the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, in which U.S. president John F. Kennedy and Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev averted a nuclear encounter (Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977). **Figure 13.6** shows that between the preliminary phase of the conflict and the climax that led to

World War I, the complexity of the political leaders' rhetoric decreased. In the Cuban missile crisis, which was successfully resolved, the complexity of the leaders' rhetoric increased between the preliminary phase of the conflict and the climax.

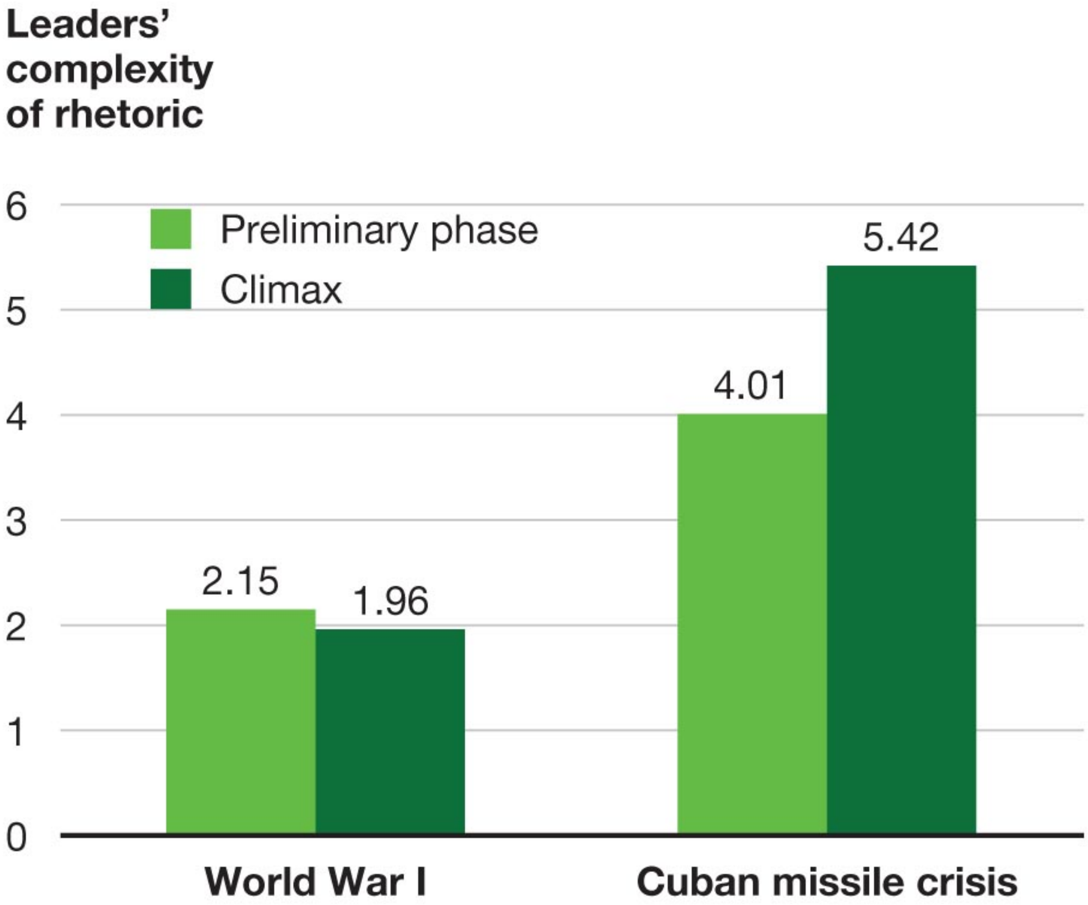


FIGURE 13.6 **CONFLICT AND THE COMPLEXITY OF RHETORIC** In international crises, leaders who speak in ways that are more complex, taking into consideration the other side's views, are more likely to avoid escalating conflicts. Source: Adapted from Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977.

BOX 13.4

FOCUS ON CULTURE

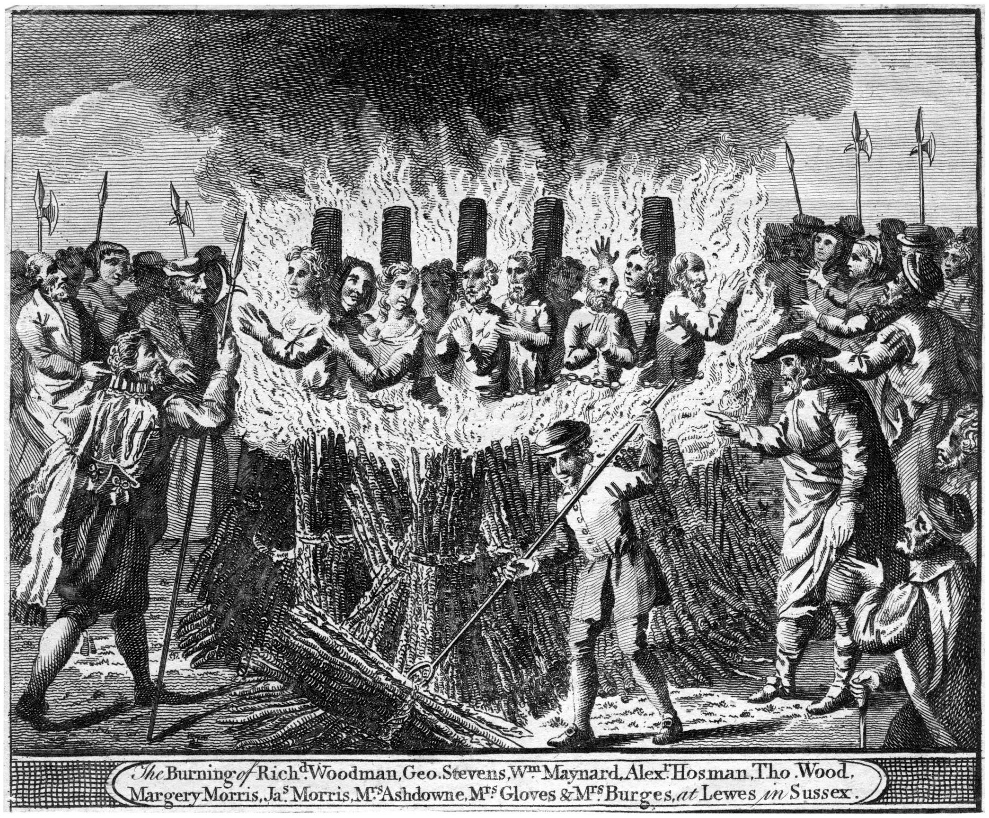
Moral Murders?

Alan Fiske and Tage Rai, in their book *Virtuous Violence*, have gone so far as to say that most murders are committed by people who feel they're acting morally (A. P. Fiske & Rai, 2014). The perpetrators feel that what they're doing is just and right. Hundreds of thousands of European Protestants were killed by Catholics to end what Catholics believed was a heresy that presented a mortal challenge to the true faith. Hundreds of thousands of Catholics were murdered by Protestants to rid the world of people who willingly supported what Protestants thought of as a manifestly evil institution. The Nazis' killing of Jews was carried out in service to a moral obligation to rid the country of "vermin" who had been deliberately undermining the fatherland for decades. Stalin killed millions of Russians because they were venal capitalists blocking the path to a communist Utopia. Mao Zedong and Pol Pot killed untold numbers of their compatriots in China and Cambodia, respectively, for the same reason.

Most family feuds and tribal conflicts are seen by their participants as having moral motives: "We must defend the family honor." "They killed one of ours, it would be cowardly and wrong not to kill one of theirs." Many more soldiers have fought for love of tribe or country than for bloodlust. Loyalists of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) behead enemies in service to what they see as their moral obligation to hasten the coming of the world caliphate.

Even the murder of one person by another over a quarrel or a perceived injustice can be rationalized by a spirit of self-righteousness: "The victim deserved to die because of what he did to me.” Members of a group will sometimes kill one of their own because of transgressions against the group’s moral code, as in stonings for adultery or stranglings for slander.

None of this implies that such actions are objectively moral but rather that the actors subjectively feel that their behavior will make the world a better place. Fiske and Rai (2014) maintain that if we fail to recognize the self-perceived morality of people who are willing to kill on a massive scale, we’re likely to misunderstand their motives and make serious mistakes in our conduct toward them. For example, governments often assume that if they simply build a strong enough war machine, they’ll defeat insurgents fighting for what they believe is a sacred cause. Such insurgent groups have been known to shock their enemies by winning the day against a force 10 times larger than their own, something they’re able to pull off because of the great moral commitment and fervor they have for their cause.


The Burning of Richd. Woodman, Geo. Stevens, Wm. Maynard, Alexr. Hosman, Tho. Wood,
Margery Morris, Jas. Morris, Mrs. Ashdowne, Mrs. Gloves & Mrs. Burges, at Lewes in Sussex.

MASS KILLINGS THROUGH HISTORY Queen Mary of England, who earned the nickname “Bloody Mary,” restored Catholicism in England and executed numerous Protestants during her reign, including the ten Protestant martyrs portrayed in this etching.

Communication and Reconciliation

> “You campaign in poetry. You govern in prose.”
>
> —MARIO CUOMO

One simple solution to the biases exacerbated by misperception and simplistic rhetoric would seem to be to encourage communication between people in conflict. Often in the heat of conflict, though, adversaries stop communicating. Politicians fighting over a budget deal hunker down with their own party, formulating strategy intended to cut their opponents out of the deal. Warring nations expel diplomats and end formal communication. In divorce proceedings, spouses are told not to communicate with each other, no matter how benign their intentions. Moreover, in today’s world of websites, talk shows, cable TV, and news sharing on social media platforms, people all too readily become immersed in echo chambers of opinion populated by like-minded individuals.

THE CAMP DAVID PEACE ACCORDS Although the communication in 1978 was painful and filled with conflict, it led to a lasting peace between Israel and Egypt. Shown here are Egyptian president Anwar Sadat (left), U.S. president Jimmy Carter (center), and Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin (right).

But numerous empirical studies find that simply allowing adversaries to communicate reduces levels of conflict and increases the chances of finding satisfying resolutions to many kinds of disagreement (L. Thompson, 2005). Communication helps reduce opponents’ misperceptions and paves the way for peacemaking and cooperation.

What specifically might you do when communicating with an adversary? One important step is to allow people on both sides of a conflict to give their perspectives. Emile Bruneau and Rebecca Saxe carried out a study in which individuals embroiled in two conflicts—the debate over immigration in the United States and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in the Middle East—communicated with each other. The design of this study built in the opportunity for less powerful individuals, who often feel voiceless in disputes, to be heard. Namely, Mexican immigrants shared their views about the difficulties of being an immigrant with White Americans in Arizona, who were simply instructed to summarize in their own words what the individuals had said (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012). In a similar fashion, Palestinians shared their perspective with Israelis. In this study, this “perspective giving” communication led Mexican American immigrants and Palestinians to have more positive attitudes about their counterparts, and “perspective taking” did the same for the White Americans and Israelis.

Another strategy for reducing conflict is to ask people on both sides of an issue to actively imagine other people’s perspectives. Ethan Kross and Igor Grossmann (2012) had student participants talk about two heated political issues and what the future would look like if their preferred candidate in the 2008 U.S. presidential election (John McCain versus Barack Obama) were to lose. They did so after being instructed either to immerse themselves in their own point of view, as people so often do during conflict, or to reflect on this political future from the perspective of someone in Iceland, thus taking on an outsider’s view of the polarizing political issues of the day. Participants who looked at the conflicts from a more distant perspective were more likely to recognize the limitations of their own knowledge, were more convinced that the conflicts of the day would change, reported less extreme attitudes, and were more likely to join a bipartisan political discussion group that brought together students of contrasting political views.

As adversaries communicate, they often move toward reconciliation, making amends for hurtful words and harmful acts, and begin to return to more peaceful relations. Even our primate relatives exhibit instinctual tendencies toward reconciliation (de Waal, 1996). For example, in the heat of conflict, chimpanzees display submissive postures and vocalizations, actions that trigger conciliation behaviors such as grooming, open-handed gestures, and even embraces. Humans resort to more complex reconciliation behaviors—confessions, apologies, signs of remorse—that may trigger forgiveness, leading to reduced need for revenge on the part of the harmed individual and increased acceptance of the other person (McCullough, 2008).

Studies of reconciliation by social psychologists have inspired an innovative alternative to punishment within the criminal justice system (McCullough, 2008). Typically in legal settings, the perpetrator and victim of a crime are separated (often for very good reason) and denied any opportunity to communicate and reconcile. As an alternative, in programs focused on restorative justice, professionals who are trained in both counseling and the law mediate conversations between perpetrators and victims. The offender takes responsibility for the crime (whereas the offender often resists confessing in a courtroom setting); the offender tries to “undo” the crime through apology, acts of reparation, or both; and the offender and victim are encouraged to engage in a respectful dialogue. As difficult as these conversations may sound, they are often highly effective. Victims of crime who participate in restorative justice programs report many fewer thoughts of revenge than comparison individuals do, and they’re more than twice as likely to forgive the offender and say that the criminal justice system is fair (L.W. Sherman & Strang, 2007). Restorative justice programs are now being trialed in an increasing number of countries.

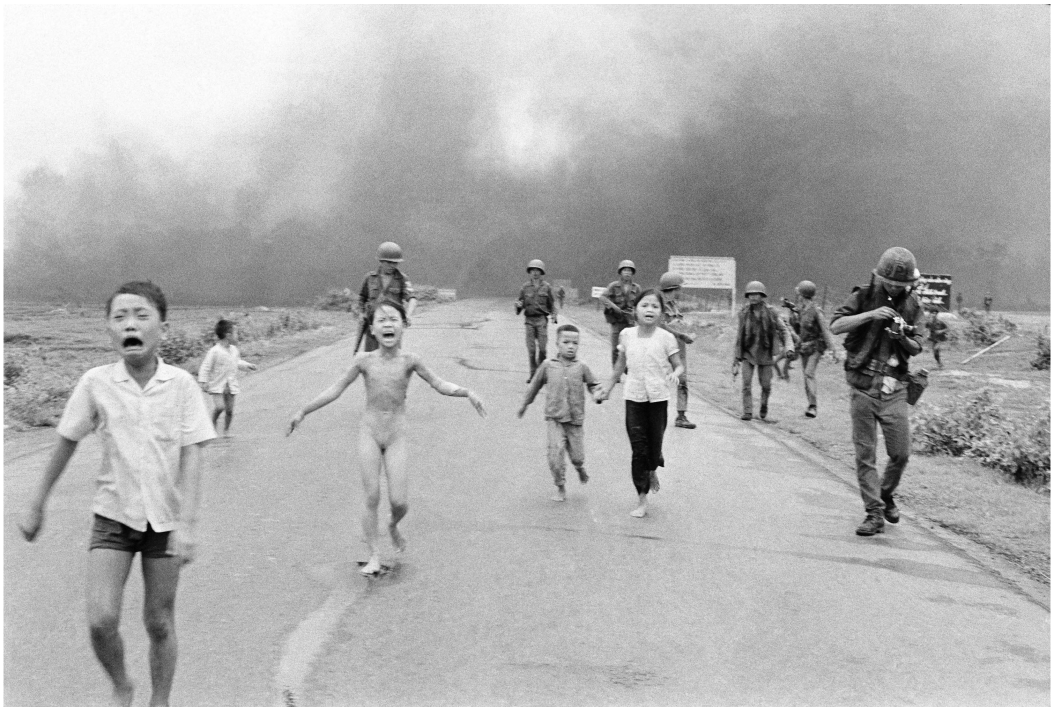
truth
reconciliation
commission
RECONCI

A PICTURE OF RECONCILIATION The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu photographed here, enabled White South Africans to take responsibility for their violations of human rights committed during the apartheid era, in acts of apology and reconciliation.

Moving Toward a Less Violent World?

In seems like nearly every day we hear dispiriting news about the prevalence of violence—genocides, school shootings, and murders. Nonetheless, psychologist Steven Pinker has offered a different perspective on our times (Pinker, 2007, 2011). He argues that we are enjoying one of the least aggressive periods in human history. The data he draws on to make his claim are broad in scope. For example, people are dramatically less likely to die in today’s wars as opposed to those in the past. Gone are the days in Europe when soldiers marched to their deaths in orderly rows, stepping over the bodies of comrades in previous rows mowed down by musket and cannon fire.

Murder rates have also fallen precipitously in every European culture that has been examined and in the former European colonies in the Western and Southern Hemispheres. In fifteenth-century England, the annual murder rate was 24 per 100,000 people; in 1960 England, it was 0.6 per 100,000. The “enhanced interrogation” techniques used by the United States at various times since the 9/11 terrorist attacks have drawn criticism from many, but several hundred years ago, more brutal torture was the norm, and it was often a form of public entertainment. Enhanced interrogation in the Spanish Inquisition often meant breaking every bone in the suspected heretic’s body with iron bars or roasting the individual slowly in an oven in the shape of a bull.



(A)

(B)

IMAGES OF WAR (A) A well-known image from the war in Vietnam, in which more than one million people were killed.

(B) A young suspect in the Vietnam war cries, believing that his father has just been killed.

How do we explain such broad cultural shifts in violence and today’s more humane treatment of our foes? Pinker believes that the printing press and the video camera have played a role. If everyone can read, everyone can be exposed to arguments against war and violence. Literacy and numeracy have made us smarter (Flynn, 1987), and in general, more educated people choose to handle their conflicts without violence. Video images of the horrors of genocide and the devastation wrought by modern weaponry can inspire a revulsion that can chill the march to war. Armed conflict has come to seem an obviously terrible solution to any problem.

> “The quality of mercy is not strained.
>
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
>
> Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
>
> It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.”
>
> —WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*

The world has also become substantially more interconnected: Our interests are more intertwined with those of people from other communities and nations. Many college campuses draw students from all over the world. People communicate with others in distant lands over the internet, especially on social media platforms. People are much more likely to marry and form friendships with people from different backgrounds. Globalization has made businesses multinational. Solutions to climate change and many other environmental problems require treaties that involve many countries. This expanding interdependence has given rise to greater cooperation among nations, states, and communities than existed in our more violent past (R. Wright, 2000). Cooperation, Pinker argues, has short-circuited our more aggressive tendencies, thereby leading to behavior that is more prosocial.

LOOKING BACK

Several construal biases, including dehumanization, misperceiving common ground, and simplistic reasoning and rhetoric, can escalate group conflict. Reconciliation processes can be a powerful tool for increasing peacemaking tendencies during and in the aftermath of conflict.

Glossary

reactive devaluation
The tendency to attach less value to an offer in a negotiation once the opposing group makes it.

restorative justice
The process of having perpetrators of harm take responsibility and apologize to those they’ve harmed and for those individuals to express their grievances.

Chapter Review

SUMMARY

Situational Determinants of Aggression

- *Hostile aggression* is motivated by anger and has the primary aim of harming others either physically or psychologically. *Instrumental aggression* is behavior intended to harm others to achieve a goal.
- Hot weather increases levels of aggressive behavior and violence. Hotter cities have higher rates of violent crime, and more violence occurs during hot months than during cool months.
- Media violence has been shown to promote aggressive acts in real life. Watching violent TV shows can lead to more aggressive behaviors in the short run, as can playing violent video games.
- Social rejection can trigger aggressive tendencies.
- Income inequality at the level of nation, state, county, neighborhood, and social context predicts aggression of just about every kind, and access to green spaces can reduce aggressive tendencies.

Construal Processes and Aggression

- Anger-related thoughts of blame and revenge, as well as patterns of fight-or-flight responses, make people more likely to respond aggressively when prompted by cues, such as the presence of weapons.
- Many forms of violence, including genocide and rape, are often facilitated by *dehumanization* of other groups, in which people are described as less than human. Group

loyalty predicts increased dehumanization of outgroup members.
- People can modify their tendencies toward anger, dehumanization, and aggression by looking at frustrating issues or conflicts from a distance.

Culture and Aggression

- People in some cultures, including the U.S. South, are especially likely to adhere to a *culture of honor*: They are inclined to respond to insults and actions that convey malicious intent with violence or threats of violence. Such cultures exist where there is a history of herding, with the associated risks of losing all wealth.
- In *rape-prone cultures*, levels of violence tend to be high in general, and rape is used as a weapon in battle. Rape is also used as a ritual act and as a threat to keep women subservient to men. Cultures that tend to grant women equal status have a lower incidence of rape.

Evolution and Aggression

- Evolutionary theory provides one perspective on family violence. Stepchildren are more subject to abuse than are genetic offspring, who can carry on parents' genetic line.
- Violent and aggressive actions are generally committed by men more than women. Women are more likely to resort to relational aggression such as gossip and ostracism to hurt others emotionally.
- The evolutionary perspective explains that men are more likely to harm other men than women are to harm women because men face fiercer competition for mates.
- In a recent synthesis of evolutionary and cultural approaches to male violence, researchers have proposed the *precarious manhood hypothesis*: A man's gender

identity is vulnerable, which makes men more reactive to threats to their identity and more likely to behave aggressively to prove their manhood.

Conflict and Peacemaking

- Groups in conflict tend to perceive the other side as more extremist than they are and social conflicts as more polarized than they are. They believe their own side is moral and reactively devalue concessions of the other side.
- Complex reasoning involving more evidence and integration of ideas is more effective than simplistic reasoning at promoting peacemaking in international conflicts.
- Sharing perspectives and getting distance on one's own views, as well as communication and reconciliation, are powerful ways to reduce conflict.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Describe the culture of honor, and provide two pieces of evidence that such a culture exists in the U.S. South. What might be the origin of these cultural tendencies?
2. According to the research described in this chapter, what kinds of attitudes and behaviors are more likely among men who dehumanize women?
3. Suppose you're the warden at a prison and can select the temperature setting for the master prison thermostat. The thermostat doesn't have enough settings, forcing you to choose between an uncomfortably cold setting and an uncomfortably hot setting. Which should you choose, and why?
4. Sometimes people respond to social rejection with physical aggression. How does the fundamental nature of

our need for social connectedness help explain this tendency?

5. Suppose a friend said to you, “Well, men are just biologically hardwired to be more aggressive than women.” How would you respond? What nuances might this perspective miss?
6. What kinds of strategies have been shown to be most effective for reducing conflict and promoting peace, and why?

The answer guidelines for the Think About It questions can be found at the back of the book . . .

ONLINE STUDY MATERIALS

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CHAPTER
14

Morality, Altruism, and Cooperation

Why do some people donate their organs to strangers?

Hembree Ln
HELPS
GOD BLESS

Why do we sometimes ignore people in need of help?

Why do people help others during times of threat and uncertainty?

OUTLINE

- Morality
- Altruism
- Cooperation

AS WE HAVE TOUCHED UPON THROUGHOUT this book, you have lived through one of the more remarkable and disruptive times in modern history—the COVID-19 pandemic, now more than two and a half years in its unfolding. As we write, 550 million people worldwide have gotten COVID, and more than 6.3 million people have lost their lives to the virus (including over 1 million people in the United States). The scale of the suffering has been vast. People often passed away in horrifying conditions, alone in hospitals unable to say goodbye to their loved ones. More people have died of COVID in the United States than died in World War II and the Korean and Vietnam Wars combined.

In the face of such suffering, people have responded with remarkable kindness and courage. After his service in Iraq as a marine, Joseph Zoleta created a nonprofit organization, Black 6 Project, that provides humanitarian relief in disaster-stricken areas of the world. When COVID started to overwhelm hospitals in the United States, his organization saw a record volume of donations flow in. With these resources, Zoleta supplied food to those dealing with the trauma of COVID in hospitals. He and his team built "rest-and-relaxation tents" near hospitals where health care workers could recharge during their long shifts.

When it became apparent that many people, in particular the elderly, would die alone because of restrictions on hospital visitors, Pat, a registered nurse in New York City, instinctively volunteered to work in hospice care, as she had done during the AIDS epidemic. Although she risked contracting COVID and spreading it to her family, she worked overtime to ensure that those who died from the virus did so with dignity.

Raj Chaudhary had a long career in Minneapolis serving the underresourced immigrants of that city. When the COVID pandemic arrived in Minnesota, she coordinated the efforts of more than 100 volunteers to deliver thousands of meals to food shelters. They did so in culturally sensitive ways, preparing meals without meat for Hindus and without pork for Muslims.

KINDNESS DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC During the pandemic, many extended more help to those in need, such as (left) the elderly, and (right) by giving away free masks.

These stories illustrate a reliable pattern in human behavior: When we face life-imperiling threat and harm, the better angels of our nature often emerge. Historians have observed how people are routinely courageous and kind in the aftermath of natural disasters, for example, or during economic depressions, or in the heat of combat. In this chapter, we consider three of these "better angels," so evident in the pandemic stories we just considered. The first is our sense of morality, or our clear intuitions about what is right and wrong—which moved Pat to offer hospice care to the elderly dying of COVID. The psychology of morality illuminates how our intuitions about right and wrong can vary and how our moral judgment works. The second is altruism, or sacrificing to improve the lives of others—which our pandemic heroes have clearly displayed in their actions. And finally, the third is cooperation, or the coordination of actions with others to bring about better social ends. Each of our heroes cooperated with others to meet specific challenges of the pandemic. ■

Morality

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe a social intuitionist model of moral judgment.
- Explain the five foundations of moral foundations theory and give an example of a morally appropriate or inappropriate action of each.
- Explain how the moral views of conservatives and liberals differ from one another.

Near the end of a legal trial, judges in the United States often caution jurors to put aside their feelings when arriving at decisions about the guilt or innocence of the defendant, sentence length, and punitive damages. This recommendation is based on a certain view of *moral judgment*—that is, judgments about what we consider to be universally right or wrong about human action and character and what is worthy of punishment or reward. This legal guidance posits that we should ignore our gut feelings when making moral judgments and instead rely on pure reason. A much different view of moral judgment has emerged in a relatively young branch of social psychology called moral psychology (Ellemers et al., 2019; Gray & Graham, 2019; Haidt, 2001). This new field focuses on how people actually make moral judgments, and the research suggests that very often those judgments are guided by feeling and intuition. To begin to appreciate this theorizing, read the following scenario and decide whether you think the actions of the protagonists are right or wrong:

> Mark and Julie are brother and sister. They are traveling together in France on a summer vacation from college. One

> night they’re staying alone in a cabin near the beach. They decide it would be interesting and fun if they tried making love. At the very least it would be a new experience for each of them. Julie was already taking birth control pills, but Mark uses a condom, too, just to be safe. They both enjoy making love, but they decide not to do it again. They keep that night as a special secret, which makes them feel even closer to each other.

When asked whether such actions are wrong, nearly all college students immediately say yes, typically with pronounced disgust (Haidt, 2001). They’re in good company. All cultures around the world view incest as immoral (D. E. Brown, 1991). When pressed to explain why Julie and Mark’s encounter is wrong, people may reason that it is dangerous to inbreed, only to be reminded that Julie and Mark are using contraception. They may contend that each would be hurt emotionally, but then they remember that the scenario clearly specified that Julie and Mark weren’t harmed in any way by the event. Eventually, when all possible reasons have been refuted, people typically say, “I can’t explain why, I just know this is wrong.” This kind of insistence on a moral conviction in the absence of reason is called *moral dumbfounding*, and it suggests that gut feelings, or intuitions, guide many of our moral judgments.

MORAL WRONG AND CLIMATE CHANGE Given the climate crises of our times, people increasingly react to images about coal-fired plants, like the one pictured here, with a sense of moral wrong.

The way people respond to this scenario illustrates the central thesis of Jonathan Haidt's social intuitionist model of moral judgment. The idea is that our moral judgments are the product of fast, emotional intuitions, like the gut feeling that incest is wrong, which then influence how we reason about the issue in question (Giner-Sorolla, 2012; Haidt, 2001, 2012; Horberg, Oveis, & Keltner, 2011; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). In other words, we feel our way to our moral judgments; we don't think our way there. Reason often *follows* our immediate gut feeling, serving to justify the moral conviction we arrived at intuitively. According to this thinking, our judgments that something is wrong and worthy of condemnation or even punishment—whether the issue is abortion, or not wearing masks during the pandemic, or violating greenhouse gas emissions standards—begin with deep intuitions that are shaped subsequently by reason.

Moral Intuition and Reason in the Brain

Joshua Greene and his colleagues provided an influential early demonstration of how moral judgments involve quick emotional responses followed by more deliberative reasoning (J. D. Greene, 2013; J. D. Greene et al., 2001). They presented participants with morally compelling scenarios and asked for quick decisions about what they would do; during this exercise, participants’ brains were scanned using fMRI. Some of the moral dilemmas were likely to engage mainly impersonal, rational calculations. An example is the well-known “trolley dilemma,” in which the participant imagines a runaway trolley headed for five people who will be killed if it proceeds on its present course. The only way to save them is to hit a switch that will turn the trolley onto another set of tracks, where, unfortunately, one person is located and will die as result of the switch. The participant is asked whether it is appropriate to hit the switch and save the five lives at the cost of the one. Most participants answer yes with only a little hesitation.

Other scenarios were more emotionally evocative. For example, in the “footbridge dilemma,” five people’s lives are again threatened by a trolley, but in this case the participant is asked to imagine standing next to a very heavy stranger on a footbridge over the trolley tracks. The participant is told that pushing the stranger off the bridge and onto the tracks would kill the stranger, but his dead body would cause the train to veer off its course and thus save the lives of the five. (The participant’s own weight, it is explained, is insufficient to send the trolley off the track.) You probably noticed that, at their core, the options in the trolley and footbridge dilemmas are the same—one death or five? But in the footbridge dilemma, the action is highly emotional: Participants must imagine placing their own hands on the stranger to push him to his death. In keeping with the social intuitionist model, the more personal moral dilemmas like the footbridge problem activated regions of the brain that are involved in emotional processing, whereas nonmoral dilemmas and relatively impersonal moral dilemmas like the trolley problem activated brain regions associated with working memory and deliberative reasoning. With these methods, social psychologists like Liane Young and Mary Immordino-Yang have begun to map in the brain how specific feelings are associated with moral judgment (Greene & Young, 2020; Immordino-Yang et al., 2009; D. Lieberman, Teichholtz, & Emery, 2019).

Moral Foundations Theory

Social intuitionist theory offers an account of how we make moral judgments. What the theory doesn’t detail are the specific bases of our moral intuitions: What realms of human social life do we have deep gut feelings, or intuitions, about? Drawing on a broad survey of different cultural practices and traditions as well as evolutionary arguments about the “moral” responses observed in our primate relatives (e.g., de Waal, 1996), Haidt has proposed moral foundations theory. According to this theory, our moral judgments are shaped by deep intuitions within five “foundations,” or domains. These foundations might be thought of as a universal blueprint for morality in every culture, which in turn is shaped by the social, economic, and religious dimensions of that culture (Doğruyol, Alper, & Yilmaz, 2019). These more automatic intuitions are based on specific emotions that guide reasoning and result in distinct moral judgments (Graham et al., 2013; Haidt, 2012; Haidt & Joseph, 2004).

The *care/harm* foundation centers on a concern for the suffering of others, especially vulnerable individuals. The moral intuitions underlying people’s concerns with care and harm are triggered by signs of vulnerability and pain, and they elicit emotions such as sympathy that orient us toward protecting the welfare of others, often at personal cost (Mongrain, Keltner, & Kirby, 2021; Tsoi et al., 2018). Many of the stories of courage during the pandemic likely arose out of this foundation, driven as they were by a basic concern for those who are in need or suffering. The foundation of *fairness/reciprocity* focuses on concerns that others act in a just, equitable fashion, and it is triggered by unfair acts—scamming, deceiving, failing to reciprocate a generous act, or taking more than one deserves (Niemi, Wasserman, & Young, 2018). Anger is the quintessential emotion associated with violations of fairness because it fuels our passion for justice. *Ingroup loyalty* pertains to the commitments we make to those in the groups we belong to. It’s the foundation for strong, cohesive social collectives, and it evokes emotions such as group pride (loyalty) or rage (betrayal). *Authority/respect* is related to honoring one’s place in social hierarchies. Our intuitions about authority and respect are expressed, as we discussed in Chapter 5, in our experience of emotions such as embarrassment, shame, envy, and pride. Finally, *purity/sanctity* centers on avoiding dangerous diseases and contaminants and socially impure ideas or actions. Disgust is the emotion most closely associated with such intuitions.

In one early test of moral foundations theory, Wilhelm Hofmann and colleagues pinged 1,252 adults on their smartphones during the course of a day and asked them to report whether they had done something moral or immoral or heard about someone else’s moral or immoral act. If so, they were asked to write briefly about what had happened (Hofmann et al., 2014). After classifying thousands of these stories of everyday morality, researchers found that 80 percent fit nicely into one or more of the five categories of moral foundations theory. Acts related to the care/harm category were by far the most common kind of everyday morality.

When we encounter moral or immoral acts, specific emotions arise that shape our initial judgments of right and wrong (Algoe, 2012; J. D. Greene & Haidt, 2002; Haidt, 2003; Horberg et al., 2011). Once our initial gut feeling is underway, we then rely on more deliberative processes—assessments of costs and benefits, causal attributions, considerations of prevailing social norms—to arrive at a final moral judgment of right or wrong.

The most-studied moral foundation is the purity/sanctity category, which involves concerns over avoiding contaminating diseases and ideas. The emotion of disgust arises in response to threats to purity, as we saw with people’s reactions to the narrative about incest (Piazza et al., 2018). Studies have shown that feelings of disgust intensify judgments that “impure” acts are morally wrong. For example, people who feel high levels of disgust about a behavior—such as smoking or eating meat—more strongly condemn the act as immoral (Rozin & Singh, 1999). Even when the original cause of disgust has nothing to do with the action being judged, the emotion still leads to more extreme moral condemnation of impure acts. For example, after being induced to feel disgust through viewing repulsive images or smelling noxious scents, participants will condemn with greater severity someone who left sweat on an exercise machine (Horberg et al., 2009; see also Inbar, Pizarro, & Bloom, 2012).

In other parts of the book, we consider additional research that is in keeping with moral foundations theory. Recall from Chapter 5 that most social mammals, and clearly humans, respond intuitively to violations of fairness with angry displays that seek to restore fairer relations (Addessi et al., 2020). We also saw how certain emotions, such as embarrassment and shame, signal status within social hierarchies and reinforce positions of authority. Later in this chapter, we will explore how the moral intuition of harm and accompanying feelings of sympathy, or empathic concern, can powerfully guide altruistic action. The scope of moral foundations theory is broad.

MORAL FOUNDATIONS AND POLITICAL DIVISIONS Moral foundations theory can help us understand today's political divisions between liberals and conservatives over issues such as abortion, gun rights, same-sex marriage, and climate crises. In Hoffman's study of everyday morality, political ideology influenced individuals' encounters with morally relevant acts: Fairness and freedom (which some consider to be a sixth moral foundation) were more common themes in the everyday moral lives of liberals, and loyalty, authority, and purity were more salient in the everyday lives of conservatives. One study that examined the content of Facebook pages during the COVID-19 pandemic found that pages championing vaccination (a liberal-leaning position) focused on the foundation of harm and care, whereas anti-vaccination Facebook pages (a conservative-leaning position) emphasized freedom and liberty (Kalimeri et al., 2019). In other research on ideological divides, individuals who oppose needle exchange programs for heroin users (which help curb the spread of diseases that are transmitted by sharing needles) do so out of concerns about purity, whereas those who endorse such programs do so out of care for people with addictions (Christie et al., 2019).

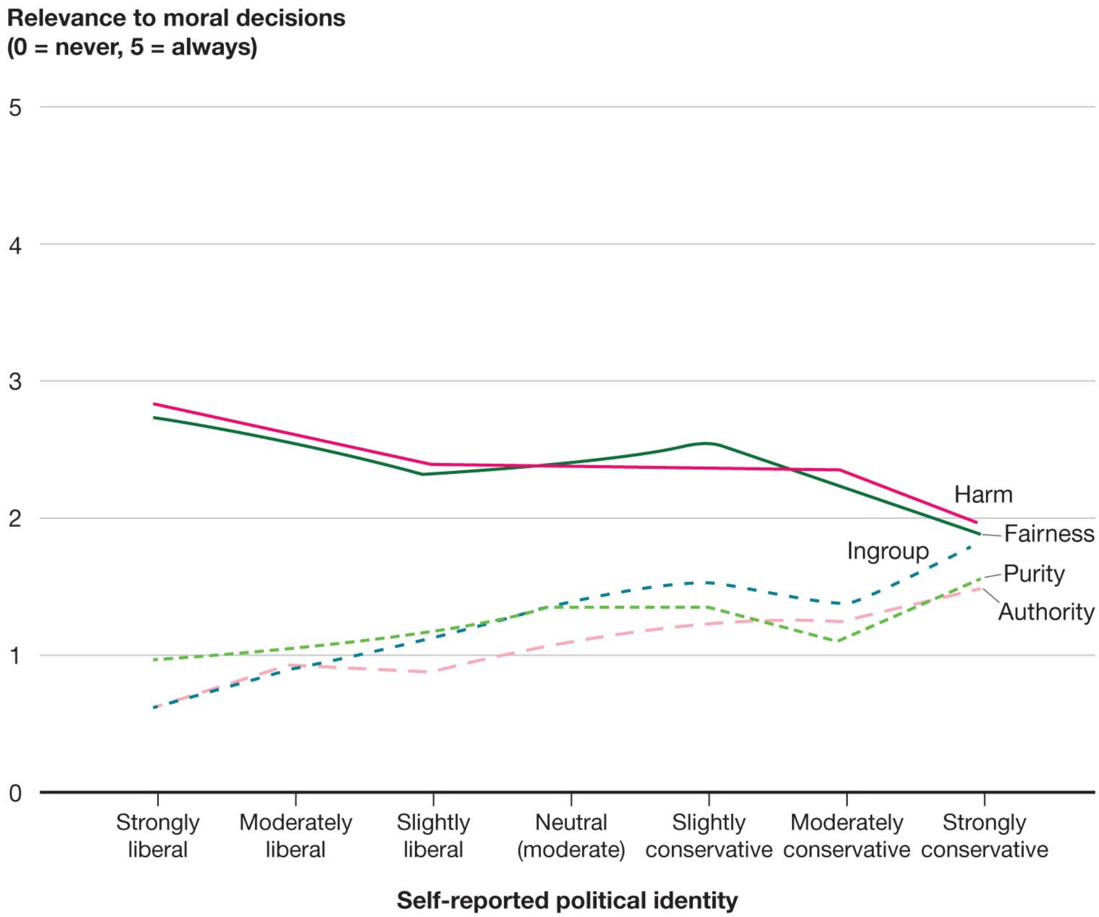


FIGURE 14.1 **MORAL FOUNDATIONS THEORY** Liberals and conservatives endorse different moral foundations. Source: Adapted from Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009, Fig. 1.

In a broader examination of morality and political ideology, surveys of tens of thousands of participants revealed that liberals and conservatives look at the world through different moral lenses and rely on different moral foundations to guide their lives (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). If you study **Figure 14.1**, you’ll see that liberals attach a bit more importance to harm and fairness than conservatives do, whereas conservatives attach considerably more importance to authority, ingroup loyalty, and purity than liberals do. It may surprise you (especially if you’re liberal) to see that conservative morality is broader, incorporating concerns about harm and fairness (though less than liberals in these categories) as well as concerns about authority, loyalty, and purity.

These differences help explain why liberals and conservatives diverge on the important issues of our day. Consider the debates over the many escalating climate crises our planet is facing. Liberals are more likely than conservatives to believe that by burning fossil fuels, humans have caused the Earth’ s average temperature to rise, which in turn is causing droughts, fires, extreme storms, rising sea levels, loss of species, and economic and political instability. How might moral foundations theory account for liberals’ and conservatives’ different levels of concern about these climate crises? Matthew Feinberg and Robb Willer note that climate change is most often framed in public discourse, including public service announcements and newspaper editorials, as being about harm (to vanishing species) and care (of natural lands, oceans, and rain forests), a framing that is likely to be more compelling to liberals (Feinberg & Willer, 2013). When conservatives are given arguments for pro-environment policies that are framed in terms of purity (and are accompanied by purity-violating images of toxic clouds, dirty drinking water, and forests covered in garbage), they express pro-environment attitudes comparable to those expressed by liberals.

MORAL FOUNDATIONS AND THE CULTURE WARS Part of the acrimony associated with the "culture wars" in the United States, depicted here in the clash between anti-Trump protesters and Trump supporters on the Berkeley campus of the University of California, derives from the fact that liberals and conservatives differ in the weight they place on the moral foundations of authority, ingroup loyalty, and purity.

Interestingly, there's an asymmetry between liberals and conservatives in their understanding of the importance that the other group attaches to the different moral foundations (Haidt, 2012). Conservatives tend to be aware that liberals value fairness and avoidance of harm more than they themselves do and that liberals value the other moral foundations less. But liberals generally fail to realize that conservatives' views often stem from their emphasis on the values of authority, loyalty, and purity.

Lest you think that political divisions and polarization are the inevitable and unchanging product of different moral worldviews, work by Sanaz Talaifar and William Swann (2019) suggests otherwise. These authors have found that when liberals identify with the United States and feel a sense of connection to the idea of the nation, they too endorse foundations such as loyalty and authority at similar levels as conservatives.

LOOKING BACK

Moral judgments are judgments of right and wrong concerning actions we deem worthy of punishment or reward. According to the social intuitionist model, our moral judgments begin in deep intuitions, or feelings about events in our social environment, which in turn guide more deliberative acts of reasoning that feed into our judgments. Moral foundations theory, which offers an account of five foundations of moral judgment, helps illuminate the political divisions between conservatives and liberals.

Glossary

social intuitionist model of moral judgment

The idea that people first have fast, emotional reactions to morally relevant events that in turn influence their process of reasoning toward a judgment of right or wrong.

moral foundations theory

A theory proposing that there are five evolved, universal moral domains in which specific emotions guide moral judgments.

Altruism

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify some of the motives for altruistic behavior.
- Describe the evidence that suggests that empathic concern is a cause of altruism.
- Differentiate between diffusion of responsibility and pluralistic ignorance and explain how they influence the likelihood of bystander intervention.
- Explain why people from different socioeconomic backgrounds tend to show different levels of altruism.

BEATST
BEATSTRO
If It Wasn't for the BRONX..
EPPELIN

FEEDING THE HUNGRY During the COVID pandemic, Alfredo Anguiera, a restaurant owner in New York City, provided free meals to first responders and others in need.

Alfredo Anguiera grew up in the Bronx as the child of Puerto Rican and Venezuelan parents. After obtaining a law degree and working for city government, Anguiera decided to start a bar and restaurant with a friend near Yankee Stadium that would serve foods from their cultural backgrounds. When the pandemic hit, their dreams were dashed. They were losing $8,000 a day and quickly heading toward bankruptcy. Two days before the restaurant was set to close, Anguiera and his partner hit upon an idea: to deliver their food that was going to waste to first responders. As they did so, their generosity caught the eye of the nonprofit World Central Kitchen (WCK), an organization started by celebrity chef José Andrés that supports food establishments that feed the hungry. Backed by WCK, Anguiera and his partner would go on to serve more than one million meals to first responders and the hungry during the pandemic (de la Rosa, 2021).

Providing food for those in need, as Anguiera did, is a clear example of altruism—prosocial behavior that benefits others without regard to the consequences for oneself. Altruistic acts arise from feelings of sympathy and compassion. At the same time, although most of us experience prosocial feelings like these, we don’t always act on them. Many forces can inhibit altruistic action, most notably basic tendencies toward self-preservation. When do we act altruistically, and when don’t we?

Empathic Concern: A Case of Pure Altruism?

> “[Sympathy] will have increased through natural selection; for those communities, which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members, would flourish best, and rear the greatest number of offspring.”
>
> –CHARLES DARWIN, *THE DESCENT OF MAN*

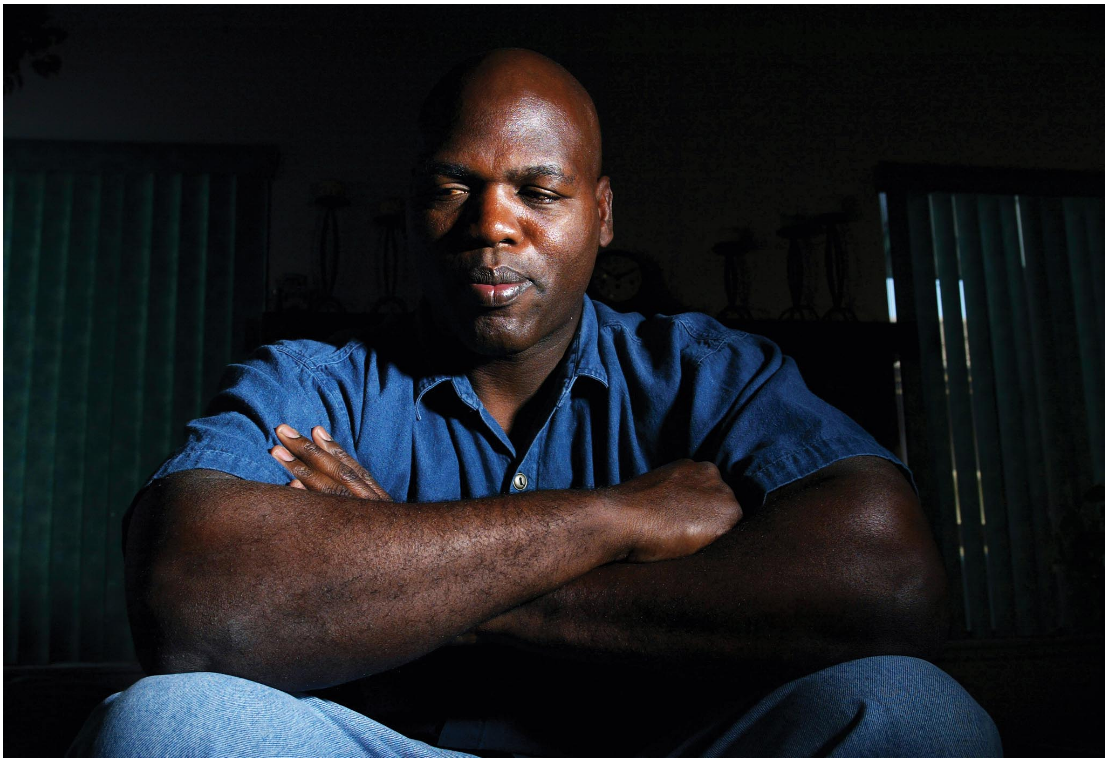
Daniel Batson has proposed that in any altruistic action, several motives are likely to be in play. Two of these motives are essentially selfish (egoistic); a third is more purely oriented toward unselfishly benefiting another person (Batson, Lishner, & Stocks, 2015; Batson & Shaw, 1991). The first selfish motive is social reward—being esteemed and valued by others in the form of praise, an award, or recognition, for example, in the mass media or social media. Those motivated by social rewards act altruistically to enjoy the positive regard of others (Inagaki et al., 2016; Nowak, Page, & Sigmund, 2000). For example, one study found that when prompted to think about enjoying the respect of others, people were more likely to choose environmentally friendly consumer products—efficient dishwashers and cars—over equivalently priced but more desirable luxury products. Our desire for the reward of being respected leads us to sacrifice personal desires for the greater good of the environment (Griskevicius, Tybur, & Van den Bergh, 2010).

Recent neuroscientific studies have found that being esteemed by others activates circuits in the brain associated with rewards and personal safety (Inagaki & Eisenberger, 2013). In fact, social rewards can be so powerful that they may trigger “arms races” of altruism, referred to as competitive altruism (Hardy & van Vugt, 2006; B. Simpson & Willer, 2015). People will try to outdo one another in their altruistic acts, all in the service of being the most highly esteemed. For example, in many hunter-gatherer cultures, the individual who gives away the most food—seal meat among the Inuit of Alaska, yams in hunter-gatherer tribes in New Guinea—enjoys the greatest status. In laboratory studies, group members will give greater social status to other group members who act altruistically (Hardy & van Vugt, 2006; Nowak & Sigmund, 2005). Social rewards are a powerful motive for altruism—but an egoistic one.

NEW YORK STATE
SENATE
Proclamation

EXTRAORDINARY ALTRUISM Ballet dancer Gray Davis jumped on the New York City subway tracks to save a fallen man in the face of an oncoming train. He is pictured here being recognized for his bravery.

A second selfish motive for helping is personal distress: People are motivated to help people in need in order to reduce their *own* distress (Cialdini & Fultz, 1990; Klimecki & Singer, 2011). We often feel personal distress upon encountering others’ suffering, a tendency that begins very early in life. In one study, newborn infants heard a tape recording of their own crying, the crying of another day-old infant, or the crying of an 11-month-old child (G. B. Martin & Clark, 1982). The newborns cried the most in response to the cries of the other newborn. Later in life, too, when we see someone crying, experiencing physical pain, or stuck in an embarrassing situation, we usually experience our own feelings of personal distress. Neuroscientific studies have found that when we watch someone else experience pain, the pain regions of our own brain are activated (Bernhardt & Singer, 2012; M. L. Meyer et al., 2013). The resulting feelings motivate us to act in ways that return us to a more peaceful state. In these instances, the most direct way to alleviate our own personal distress is to reduce the distress of the other person, and helping behavior is one way to do it.



HEROIC ALTRUISM During the social unrest in Los Angeles in 1992, Reginald Denny was pulled from his truck and severely beaten. Bobby Green (pictured here) and several other local residents rushed to the scene to rescue Denny.

The third motive is empathic concern: the feeling people experience when identifying with someone in need, accompanied by the intention to enhance the other person’s welfare (Zaki, 2018). Batson has made a persuasive case that this selfless, other-oriented state motivates altruistic behavior like that of Alfredo Anguiera (Batson et al., 2015; Batson & Shaw, 1991). When we encounter somebody else who is suffering or in pain, we imagine what that person must be experiencing. Taking the other’s perspective in this way results in an empathic state of concern, or what we might call sympathy or compassion, which motivates us to enhance that person’s welfare, even at our own expense.

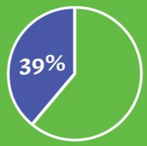
A CLOSER LOOK

How Selfish Are We?

One of the most widespread assumptions in Western thought is that humans are fundamentally selfish, motivated to achieve their own desires even to the point of dishonesty, theft, and violence. For Sigmund Freud, our actions are motivated by the pleasure principle—we do things that maximize personal pleasure. Niccolò Machiavelli characterized the human race as "fickle, hypocritical, and greedy of gain." Are we hardwired by evolution to maximize our own interests even to the point of harming others? What does social psychology have to say? Something much different.

It Feels Good to Give

In experiments where subjects decide how much of a payment to give to another subject,

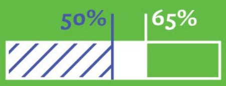


people give 39% even though they can give as little as 1%.[1]

71%

of people give between 40% and 50% of their resources.[2]

When asked to decide quickly how much to give to a group they are working with, people give 65% of their resource.

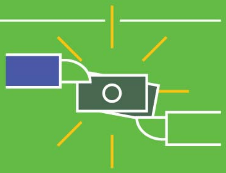


When asked to deliberate over the decision, they give 50%.[3]

Nearly

70%

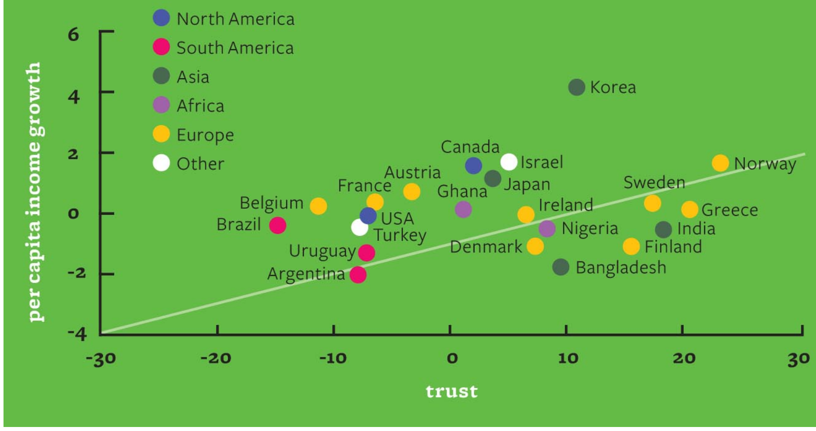
of 14-month-olds will spontaneously assist an experimenter trying to pick up a pen.[4]



When people give money, the reward circuit of the brain is activated to the same degree as when they receive money.[5]

Trust and Economic Growth

If we assume other people are essentially altruistic and will treat us fairly, we are more likely to cooperate and be generous with our time and resources, and this behavior is likely to benefit our community as a whole. In fact, one study found a strong link between trust and income growth in nations around the world.[6]



FOR CRITICAL THINKING

1. Explain the pattern you see in the graph. Can you think of reasons that this relationship might exist between trust and income growth?
2. Think of a few instances where you behaved altruistically. What factors influenced you to do so? Who, if anyone, was with you? Did you stand to benefit from your giving behavior?

Sources: 1. Henrich et al., 2001; 2. Fehr & Schmidt, 1999; 3. Rand, Greene, & Nowak, 2012; 4. Warneken & Tomasello, 2007; 5. Harbaugh, Mayr & Burghart, 2007; 6. Trust and Growth: Zak & Knack, 2001.

According to Batson, this experience of empathic concern is fast and intuitive and produces selfless altruism. It’ s the split-second feeling of empathy that led so many during the pandemic to sacrifice, share, and risk their lives for others. One recent study examined the reasons why “extreme altruists” risked their own lives to save others (Rand & Epstein, 2014). Most typically, they explained their life-imperiling acts of altruism by referring to an automatic, emotion-like impulse to help others.

EMPATHY IN CHILDREN From early in life, children often respond altruistically to others in need of help.

EMPATHY VERSUS PERSONAL DISTRESS Now comes the tricky part: documenting that altruistic action can be motivated by empathic concern alone, independent of the egoistic motives of desiring social rewards and reducing personal distress. To do so, Batson and his colleagues have carried out studies in which participants encounter a distressed person for whom they presumably feel empathic concern (Batson & Shaw, 1991). At the same time, egoistic motives are manipulated to make helping behavior less likely. In the experiment, there may be no social rewards for helping, or participants might have the opportunity to reduce their personal distress without helping. If participants still help in these circumstances, one can infer that feelings of empathic concern led to the helping behavior.

An initial study pitted empathic concern against the selfish motive of reducing personal distress by allowing participants to simply leave the experiment (Batson et al., 1983).

Participants were told they would interact with another participant of the same gender (actually a confederate) who would complete several trials of a digit-recall task and receive a shock after each mistake. In the easy-escape condition, the participant had to watch the confederate receive only two of the ten shocks and was then free to leave the experiment while the confederate finished the study. In the difficult-to-escape condition, the participant was told it would be necessary to watch the other person take all ten shocks.

After the first two trials, the confederate, made up to look a little pale, asked for a glass of water, mentioned feelings of discomfort, and recounted a traumatic shock experience from childhood. At this point, participants reported on their current feelings, which were used to divide participants into those who were feeling egoistic distress and those who were feeling empathic concern. The experimenter then asked if the participant would be willing to take some of the confederate’ s shocks. Those participants who mostly felt distress and could escape the situation acted upon this egoistic tendency and took fewer shocks on behalf of the confederate. In keeping with the idea of a more selfless state of altruism, those participants who felt empathic concern volunteered to take more shocks, even when they could leave the study.

Those still skeptical about the possibility of pure altruism based on empathic concern might have a few reservations about this first study. First of all, empathic concern wasn’ t manipulated; instead, empathic participants were identified according to their self-reports. Perhaps there was a selection bias in this study—that is, the high-empathy participants might just be more helpful in general for reasons other than a selfless response to the confederate in need. Second, the experimenter would know how the participant acted, so a social reward account of this study can’ t be ruled out. Perhaps participants who took more shocks on behalf of the confederate hoped to impress the experimenter or wanted to avoid embarrassing themselves by leaving a person in obvious need. It would be much more telling to show that there are substantial rates of helping when doing so is completely anonymous. That notion motivated Batson’s next study.

ALTRUISM IN ANIMALS Taking care of others is seen in many nonhuman species, such as these elephants helping a younger elephant.

ANONYMOUS ALTRUISM In this study, Batson and his colleagues had their participants, all women, interact with another person, a “communicator,” seated in another cubicle (Fultz et al., 1986). The communicator, a student confederate who called herself Janet Arnold, wrote two honest and confessional notes to each participant. The task of the listener (the actual participant) was to form as accurate an impression of Janet as possible. This time, empathic concern was manipulated. In the low-empathy condition, the participant was told to be as objective as possible when reading the notes, to concentrate on the facts at hand. In the high-empathy condition, the participant was told to imagine as vividly as possible how Janet felt. In the first note to the participant, Janet confessed to feeling out of place at her new home at the university. In the second note, Janet expressed a strong need for a friend and asked the participant if she’d like to hang out a bit.

After receiving the second note, the participant was told that Janet had finished and left the study. The experimenter then gave the participant a form that described another “long-term relationship study” and asked whether the participant would like to spend time at some later date with Janet Arnold. In the low-social-evaluation condition, Janet’s notes were delivered in sealed envelopes, and the experimenter didn’t read them. Similarly, the participant indicated how much time she would spend with Janet on a form enclosed in a sealed envelope to be sent to the professor conducting the long-term relationship study (who was never to meet the participant). Neither the experimenter nor Janet would know of the participant’s response. In contrast, in the high-social-evaluation condition, both the experimenter and the participant read Janet’s notes, and Janet and the experimenter would know how much time the participant said she would be willing to spend with Janet. The critical dependent measure was the number of hours the participant volunteered to spend with Janet.

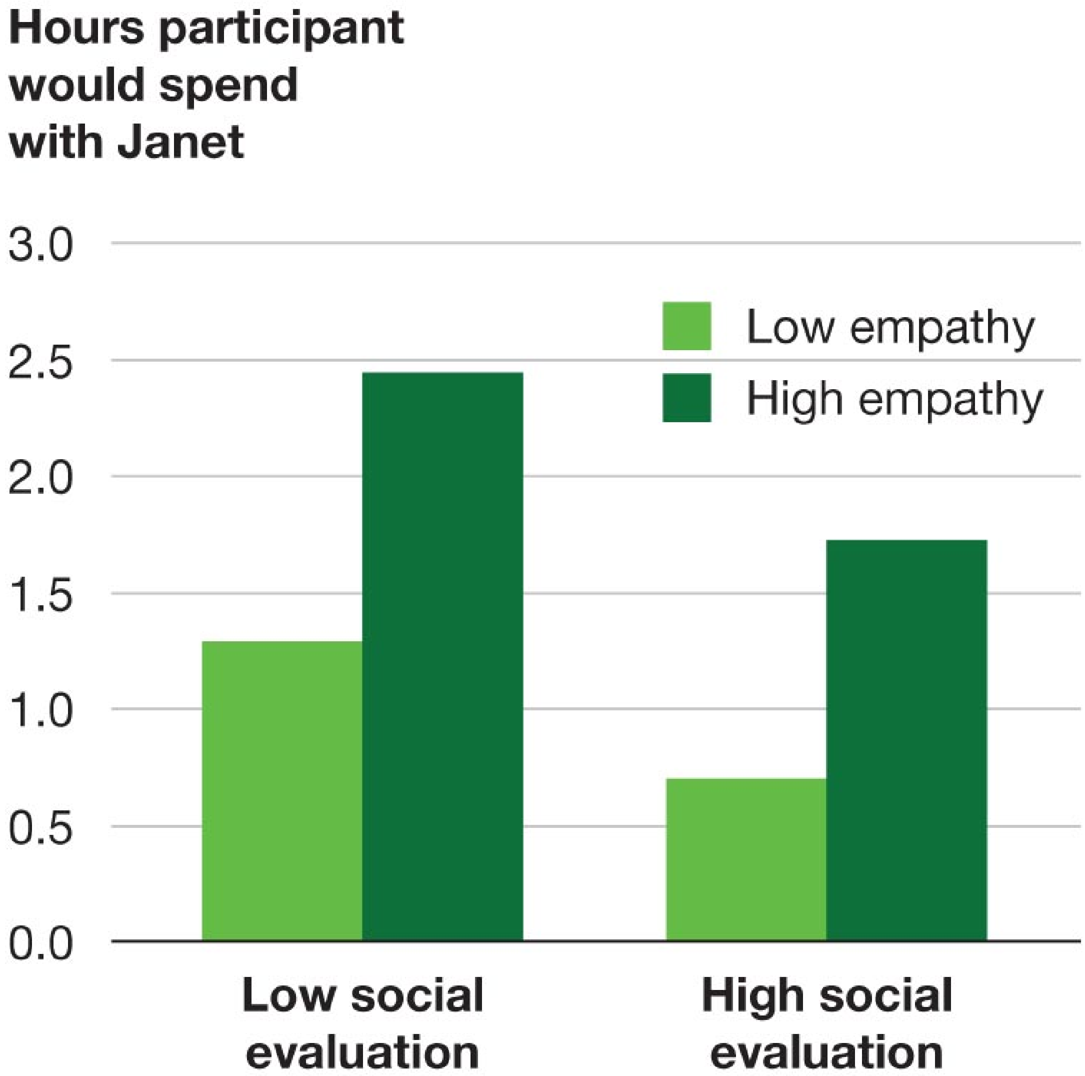


FIGURE 14.2 **EMPATHY AND ALTRUISM** This study showed that when participants empathize with someone who is in need, they engage in more altruistic action, even when their sacrifice is anonymous. Source: Adapted from Fultz et al., 1986.

As **Figure 14.2** shows, participants in the high-empathy condition volunteered to spend more time with her, even when no one would know of their action.

Still other studies lend further support to Batson’s thesis that a feeling of empathic concern can promote altruistic behavior. In a study of medical school students, those who showed increases in self-reported empathy over the course of three years later gave more to charity when given the opportunity to do so (K. E. Smith, Norman, & Decety, 2020). Five-year-old children from Germany and India who showed more emotional concern in response to facial expressions of distress were more likely to show altruistic behavior in the lab (Rajhans et al., 2016). Compared with ordinary people, highly altruistic kidney donors tended to show greater reactivity in the amygdala, a region of the brain that is involved in emotion and appraisals of threat and distress, in response to others’ facial expressions of fear (A. A. Marsh et al., 2014). Across different cultures, people who feel more empathic concern and compassion in general tend to behave in a more altruistic fashion (Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010).

THE EVOLUTION AND PHYSIOLOGY OF EMPATHIC CONCERN Since Batson’s discoveries, scientists in various disciplines, using different kinds of evidence, have sought to make the case that humans are indeed wired for altruism. One kind of evidence comes from our primate relatives and speaks to the deep evolutionary origins of altruism (de Waal & Suchak, 2010). Observations of chimpanzees and bonobos have found that they occasionally provide care to those in need, such as fellow primates who have lost their eyesight or are crippled (de Waal, 1996). They also regularly share food with non-kin in their community, a basic form of altruistic action (de Waal & Lanting, 1997).

> “I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the

> Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”
>
> - ACTS 20:35

If a selfless form of altruism is part of our evolutionary heritage, we might also expect to observe it in young children, much as children reliably show other species-defining tendencies, such as the fear of strangers and the ability to learn language. Work by Felix Warneken and Michael Tomasello (2006) provides impressive evidence of young children’s altruistic tendencies. In this research, 18-month-olds encountered adults in need. In one situation, the toddler saw an adult drop a pen and attempt, unsuccessfully, to pick it up from the floor. In the control condition the 18-month-olds encountered the same stimuli—such as the dropped pen—but the adult nearby did not express any need for help. Impressively, in the experimental condition 40–60 percent of the children helped the adult strangers in need, but they did not engage in the helpful actions in the control condition. Quite early in development, children will respond altruistically to others in need, thus providing still more evidence that people are wired to care and share (Tomasello, 2019).

A third kind of evidence in support of the claim that we’re wired to be altruistic comes from the study of neurophysiology. That is, regions of our nervous system appear to enable us to act altruistically. Much as stress-related blood pressure and the release of the hormone cortisol support fight-or-flight behavior, certain physiological systems may support what social psychologist Shelley Taylor called the “tend and befriend” response, or prosocial tendencies (Hornstein, Inagaki, & Eisenberger, 2020; Keltner et al., 2014; Klimecki & Singer, 2017; A. A. Marsh, 2016; S. E. Taylor, 2006). When we feel compassion and are inclined to act altruistically, a distinct part of the frontal lobes is activated (Bernhardt & Singer, 2012). Compassion is also correlated with activation of the vagus nerve, the largest bundle of nerves in the human nervous system, which wanders from the brain stem at the top of the spinal cord to muscles in the throat, through the lungs and heart (causing deeper breathing and heart rate deceleration), and eventually to the digestive organs and immune system. When the vagus nerve is activated, it enables vocal communication, eye contact, and the slowing of the stress response; it is thus thought to be an ancient physiological system that promotes social connection (Porges, 2001). Recent empirical studies have found that the vagus nerve is engaged in both adults and children when they are feeling empathic concern (compassion), or performing acts of altruism (J. G. Miller, Kahle, & Hastings, 2017; Stellar et al., 2015).

EMPATHIC CONCERN AND VOLUNTEERISM Batson’ s research shows that feelings of empathic concern and sympathy increase the likelihood that people will act altruistically to help those who are suffering. These feelings are also a primary determinant of other prosocial behaviors. For example, Allen Omoto and Mark Snyder have studied volunteerism, which they define as unpaid assistance: when people help out with no expectation of receiving any compensation (Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Stürmer, Snyder, & Omoto, 2005). In the United States, estimates indicate that close to 30 percent of people volunteer in some way, whether providing companionship to older adults, mentoring troubled children, feeding those in poverty, teaching classes in prison, or assisting the sick and dying (Omoto, Malsch, & Barraza, 2009). As with altruism, volunteerism has many motives, including a desire for social rewards and a desire to reduce personal distress. But Omoto and his colleagues have found that self-reports of feelings of empathic concern also predict the likelihood that an individual will engage in volunteerism (Omoto et al., 2009). In fact, people will undergo a great deal of suffering to contribute in charitable ways when such acts provide them with a sense of purpose (Olivola & Shafir, 2013). These tendencies toward volunteerism are enhanced by a sense of community (Omoto & Packard, 2016).

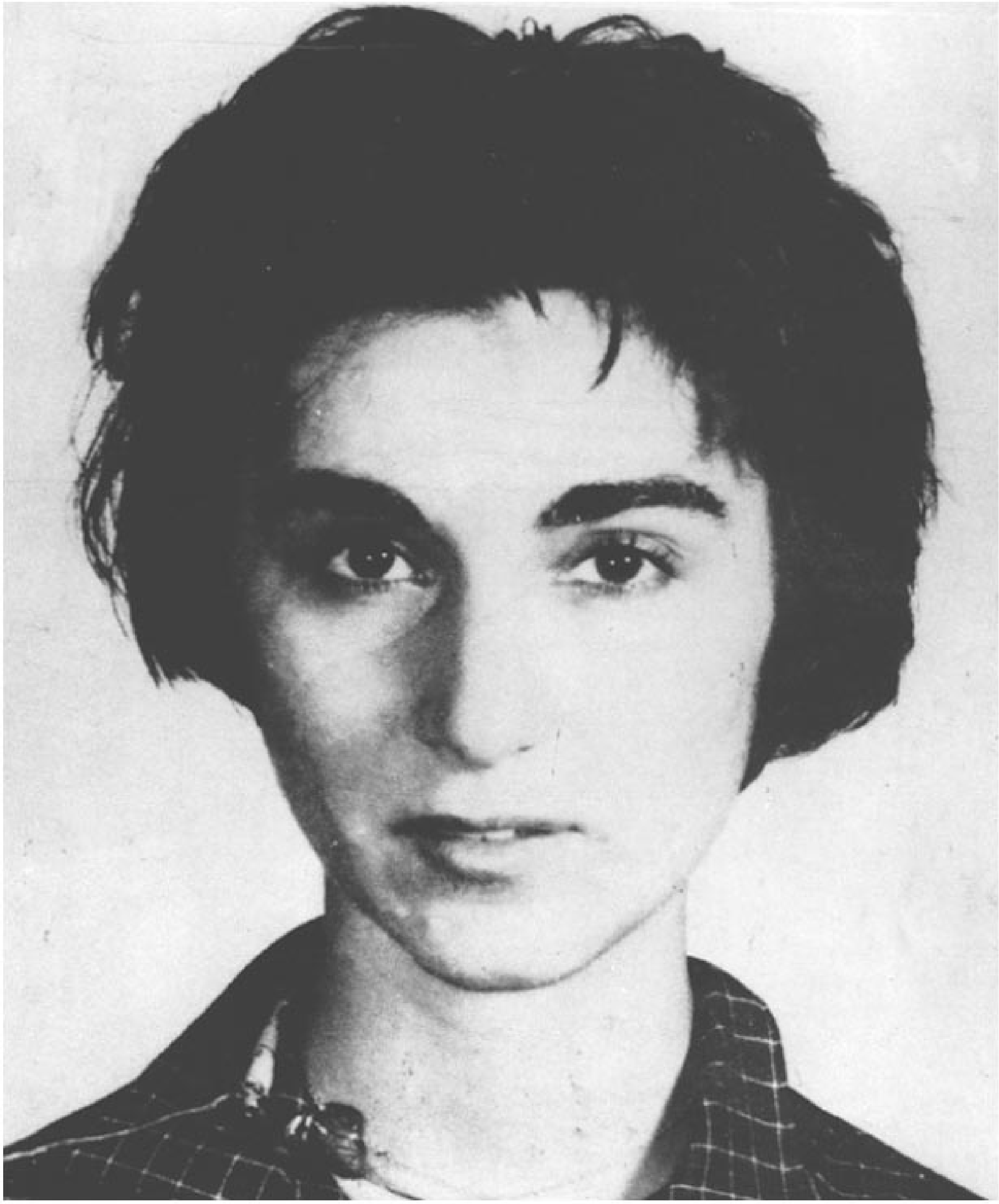
Evidence suggests that volunteering is good for your health. Stephanie Brown and her colleagues studied 423 elderly married couples over the course of five years and found that volunteerism increases longevity (S. L. Brown et al., 2003). At the beginning of the study, the participants reported how often they offered help to other people by doing errands, shopping, or providing childcare for neighbors. Participants also indicated how often they were the recipients of this kind of help from people other than their spouses. People who did more for others were less likely to die during the five years of the study, when controlling for the participants’ initial health, gender, and social contacts (see also Konrath et al., 2012). And how about the recipients of help? They were no less likely to die than people who didn’t receive help. A subsequent review of several studies of this kind found that volunteering is associated with a reduction of mortality by 22 percent (Jenkinson et al., 2013).

But what cultivates empathic concern in people? What produces the good-hearted citizens who make sacrifices and volunteer? One answer comes from the remarkable work of Samuel and Pearl Oliner, who interviewed more than 100 rescuers from World War II—individuals who risked their lives to save Jews during the Nazi Holocaust (Oliner & Oliner, 1988). (Samuel Oliner himself was saved by such a person in Poland as a young boy.) In the course of these interviews, rescuers reported that altruism and compassion were highly valued in their homes and that their parents and grandparents frequently told stories from their own lives and from their culture in which altruism was a theme. Altruism was also a central theme in the books the family read and the teachings they discussed. In their dinnertime conversations about the happenings of the day, they discussed events through the lens of altruism and concern for other people. Altruism was explicitly invoked as an important ethical principle. Empathic concern apparently is a powerful force for good in human societies that can be passed from parents to children.

VOLUNTEERING AND BETTER HEALTH Volunteering, such as serving food in soup kitchens, can contribute to improving the volunteer’ s health.

Situational Determinants of Altruism

People don’ t always act on the basis of their empathic impulses. Consider the horrifying tragedy that ended Kitty Genovese’ s life on March 13, 1964. As Genovese walked home one night in Queens, New York, Winston Moseley stalked her, attacked her near her apartment, and stabbed her in the back as she ran away. After Genovese’ s initial cries for help, lights went on and windows opened in the surrounding apartments. Moseley left but returned, wearing a hat to disguise his face; he stalked his victim to a stairwell in her building, stabbed her eight more times, and then raped her. New York City police got a call 30 minutes after the cries of distress first awakened neighbors. By the time the police arrived, Kitty Genovese was beyond help and died in the arms of a neighbor.



FAILING TO INTERVENE IN AN EMERGENCY Kitty Genovese was a young woman who was stalked and killed outside her apartment in Queens, New York.

Newspaper reports of the Genovese incident shocked the American public. Like Stanley Milgram’s studies of obedience to authority (see Chapters 1, 4, and 8), the episode raises fundamental questions about who we are as a species. How can people be so indifferent to the suffering of others? Accounts of Kitty Genovese’s murder moved several social psychologists to attempt to understand the processes that inhibit empathic concern and altruistic action and make people reluctant to intervene during emergencies.

THE PRESENCE OF OTHER PEOPLE One important factor that influences whether people will stop to help others in need is the presence of other people. Bystander intervention refers to assistance given by people who witness an emergency. Studies find that people are less likely to help when others are around (Latané & Nida, 1981). In part, the presence of other bystanders at emergencies reduces the likelihood of helping because of a diffusion of responsibility: Knowing that others have seen the situation, each bystander tends to assume the others will intervene—indeed, may be better positioned to intervene—and thus each person feels less responsibility to help out.

DIFFUSED RESPONSIBILITY People often fail to help someone in obvious need because they don’t interpret the situation as an emergency or because they assume that others will help.

One of the best-known studies on the effect of other people’s presence on altruistic behavior was inspired by the Genovese tragedy (Darley & Latané, 1968). College students sat in separate cubicles discussing the problems associated with living in an urban environment. They engaged in this conversation over an intercom system that allowed only one participant to talk at a time. One of them, a confederate (one of the authors of this book, as it happens), described his difficulties in adjusting to urban life and mentioned he had problems with seizures from time to time, especially when under stress. Then, after everyone else had spoken, the confederate took his second turn. As he did so, he became increasingly loud and incoherent; he choked and gasped. Before falling silent, he uttered the following words:

> If someone could help me out it would it would er er s-s-sure be sure be good . . . because er there er er a cause I er I uh I’ve got a a one of the er sei-er-er things coming on and and and I could really er use some help so if somebody would er give me a little h-help uh er-er-er-er-er c-could somebody er er help er uh uh uh (choking sounds) . . . I’m gonna die er er I’m gonna die er help er er seizure er (chokes, then quiet). (Darley & Latané, 1968, p. 379)

Participants had been randomly assigned to one of three conditions in which they were led to believe that their discussion group consisted of a certain number of students: only two students (the participant and the victim), three students (the participant, the victim, and another person), or six students (the participant, the victim, and four other people). The presence of others had a strong effect on the likelihood of helping. Eighty-five percent of the participants in the two-person condition, and hence the only witness to the victim’s seizure, left their cubicles to help the student in distress. In contrast, 62 percent of the participants in the three-person condition and 31 percent of those in the six-person condition attempted to help the victim.

Several related studies that have examined whether people are less likely to help someone when other people are around or when they are alone have produced similar results. In these studies, a participant might witness a victim in danger, someone passed out in the subway, or a theft occurring in a store (for a review, see Latané & Nida, 1981). Across these kinds of studies, 75 percent of people helped when they were alone compared with 53 percent who helped when they were in the presence of others. More recent neuroscience research has found that the presence of others weakens the strength of the communication between the regions of the brain involved in initiating action and understanding the outcomes of action, thus pointing to the neural underpinnings of diffusion of responsibility that make us less likely to help when others are around (Beyer et al., 2017).

VICTIM CHARACTERISTICS Needless to say, altruism isn’t blind, nor is it indiscriminate. People are most likely to help when the harm to the victim is clear and the need is unambiguous (S. L. Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977). Researchers have studied altruistic intervention when a person in need either screams or remains silent. Bystanders help victims who scream and make their needs known 75–100 percent of the time, but they help silent victims only 20–40 percent of the time.

More enduring characteristics of the victim also influence rates of helping. Most notably, people are more likely to help others who are similar to them (Dovidio, 1984), including those from their own racial or ethnic group or a similar social class background (Latané & Nida, 1981). In a study by Joan Chiao and her colleagues, Black Americans responded with greater empathy and more altruistic inclinations when viewing the suffering of Black Americans as opposed to European Americans. Only the suffering of participants’ own group members activated a brain region (the medial prefrontal cortex) that’s involved in empathic response (Mathur et al., 2010). In keeping with this theme, studies of charitable contributions find that the wealthy tend to systematically direct their acts of philanthropy to institutions and organizations that largely benefit people like themselves, such as private universities and colleges and arts organizations, rather than social service organizations that benefit poorer socioeconomic groups (Piff, Kraus, & Keltner, 2017).

Other species also appear to respond altruistically to their own group. Several nonhuman primates will give up the opportunity to eat and will partially starve themselves if their action will terminate a shock that is being administered to a member of their own species—something they won’t do for members of other species (Preston & de Waal, 2002).

CROSS-SPECIES HELPING Altruism between different species occurs with surprising frequency. This Kangal Shepherd dog feeds two newborn lambs.

Construal Processes and Altruism

What would go through your mind if you were on your way to a meeting and encountered a person slumped over in a hallway or if you witnessed someone passing out on the subway? What is it about hearing obvious cries of distress or being in the presence of others that influences our inclination to help? In other words, what are the construal processes that influence whether we help or not?

In everyday life, many instances of distress are surprisingly ambiguous. A loud apparent dispute between a couple on the street might be careening toward violence and require intervention. But perhaps it's only a nonthreatening lovers' spat or just two thespians acting out a dramatic scene from a play. Similarly, a group of adolescent boys could be pummeling a smaller boy—or perhaps they’re just playfully wrestling.

HELPING IN AMBIGUOUS SITUATIONS Given the ambiguity of many emergencies, the decision to help means that the potential helper first has to believe that assistance is actually needed based on clues from the victim’s behavior. As discussed earlier, when people in need vocalize their distress with loud cries, they’re much more likely to be helped because their need for assistance is not ambiguous (Schroeder et al., 1995). Similarly, people are more likely to provide assistance when they are vividly aware of the events that led to the victim’s distress (Piliavin, Piliavin, & Broll, 1976). In a study demonstrating this, participants saw a confederate who was unconscious. In the more vivid condition, participants saw the confederate faint and slowly regain consciousness. In the less vivid condition, participants saw only the aftermath of the incident—a confederate just regaining consciousness. Participants were much more likely to come to the individual’s aid (89 percent versus 13 percent) when they saw the entire drama unfold because they understood the full nature of the problem. It’s now believed that one reason many people didn’t come to Kitty Genovese’s defense is that few people saw the full unfolding of the attack; instead, they caught only glimpses of the murder and thus likely didn’t understand the degree of harm taking place.

The surrounding social context also influences whether bystanders will think help is needed. A form of pluralistic ignorance occurs when people are unsure about what’s happening and assume that nothing is wrong because no one else is responding or appears concerned. Staying calm and collected in public, especially during emergencies, is dictated by established social norms. It’s embarrassing, after all, to be the one who loses composure when there’s no actual danger. When everyone in a potentially dangerous situation behaves as if nothing is wrong, each person will tend to mistake the others' calm demeanor as a sign that there's no emergency (Latané & Darley, 1968).

PLURALISTIC IGNORANCE If someone's in trouble, bystanders may do nothing if they aren't sure what is happening and don't see anyone else responding. Are these three men playfully roughhousing and dancing around, or is a fight taking place?

In one study that examined the role of pluralistic ignorance in bystander intervention, researchers asked participants to fill out a stack of questionnaires (Latané & Darley, 1968). Participants were assigned to one of three conditions in which they carried out this task: alone, in a room with two passive confederates exhibiting the calm demeanor intended to produce pluralistic ignorance, or with two other genuine participants. As participants in these three conditions completed their questionnaires, smoke started to filter in from beneath a door, filling the room. When participants were alone and had no input from other participants as to what was happening, 75 percent of them left the room and reported the smoke to the experimenter. (What could the other 25 percent have been thinking?) In the two other conditions, pluralistic ignorance took hold, and participants were less likely to assume that something was amiss. Even in the condition with two other real participants, only 38 percent of the participants left to report the smoke. And remarkably, with two passive confederates showing no signs of concern, only 10 percent reported the smoke to the experimenter.

Anecdotal evidence from this study suggests that participants construed the smoke differently in the three conditions. The students who did report the smoke construed it as a sign of imminent danger. Participants who didn’t report the smoke consistently reported that they didn’t believe it was dangerous. One participant ventured the hypothesis that it was truth gas!

COMBATING PLURALISTIC IGNORANCE Bystanders are less likely to fall prey to pluralistic ignorance when they can clearly see one another’s initial expressions of concern (and before these initial expressions are covered up out of the desire to seem less alarmed). In one study that illustrates this idea, participants had to pass by a worker doing repairs in a hallway on the way to the lab room where the study was being held (Darley, Teger, & Lewis, 1973). Once in the lab room, as part of the experiment, participants had to draw a picture of a horse, either by themselves (the control condition), facing another participant, or turned away from the other participant. As the participants labored over their drawings, they suddenly heard a loud crash and the worker crying out in obvious pain, “Oh, my leg!” An impressive 90 percent of those who were alone (the control condition) left the room to help the worker. The results of the other two conditions make it clear that seeing others’ spontaneous emotional expressions reduces the effects of pluralistic ignorance. While only 20 percent of the participants who were seated back-to-back left to help the worker, demonstrating pluralistic ignorance, a full 80 percent of those who were seated face-to-face left to help. Being able to see others' initial, spontaneous reactions led participants to interpret the incident as a true emergency requiring their help, which enabled these participants to overcome pluralistic ignorance and offer assistance.

So, how do you improve your chances of getting help when you need it? According to John Darley, who studied bystander intervention for more than a decade, two things are likely to be effective: (1) make your need clear ("I've twisted my ankle and I can't walk; I need help") and (2) select a specific person ("You there, can you help me?"). By doing so, you overcome the two greatest obstacles to intervention: You prevent people from concluding there is no real emergency (thereby eliminating the effect of pluralistic ignorance), and you prevent them from thinking someone else will help (thereby overcoming diffusion of responsibility).

Culture and Altruism

Suppose it's late at night, and you need assistance. Where do you think you'd be more likely to get help: in a large metropolis or a small rural town? in a low-income neighborhood or a rich one? near a church or far from a place of worship? Each of these questions involves the influence of a different kind of culture—geographical region, social class, and religiousness—on altruism. The prevalence of altruistic behavior varies with these types of cultural influences in dramatic and sometimes surprising ways.

ALTRUISM IN URBAN AND RURAL SETTINGS All across the world, people are moving out of small villages in the countryside to large cities. And recent studies have suggested that the communities they're leaving behind might be kinder and more altruistic: According to survey research, people in rural areas report higher levels of empathic concern (T. W. Smith, 2009). To investigate whether higher levels of empathic concern lead to more altruistic behavior, Nancy Steblay (1987) reviewed 35 studies that focused on comparisons of helping rates in rural and urban environments ranging in population from fewer than 1,000 people to more than one million. In all, 17 opportunities to offer assistance were created experimentally, typically in naturalistic settings. Researchers examined whether people would grant simple requests (such as giving the time of day when asked), whether they would intervene to stop a crime, and whether they would help people in need (an injured pedestrian, for instance).

Steblay’s analysis showed that strangers are significantly more likely to be helped in rural communities than in urban areas (**Figure 14.3**). The effect of population size was particularly pronounced in towns with populations between 1,000 and 50,000. Thus, you’re much more likely to be helped in a town of 1,000 than a town of 5,000; in a town of 5,000 than a town of 10,000; and so on. Once the population rises above 50,000, however, increasing population has little effect.

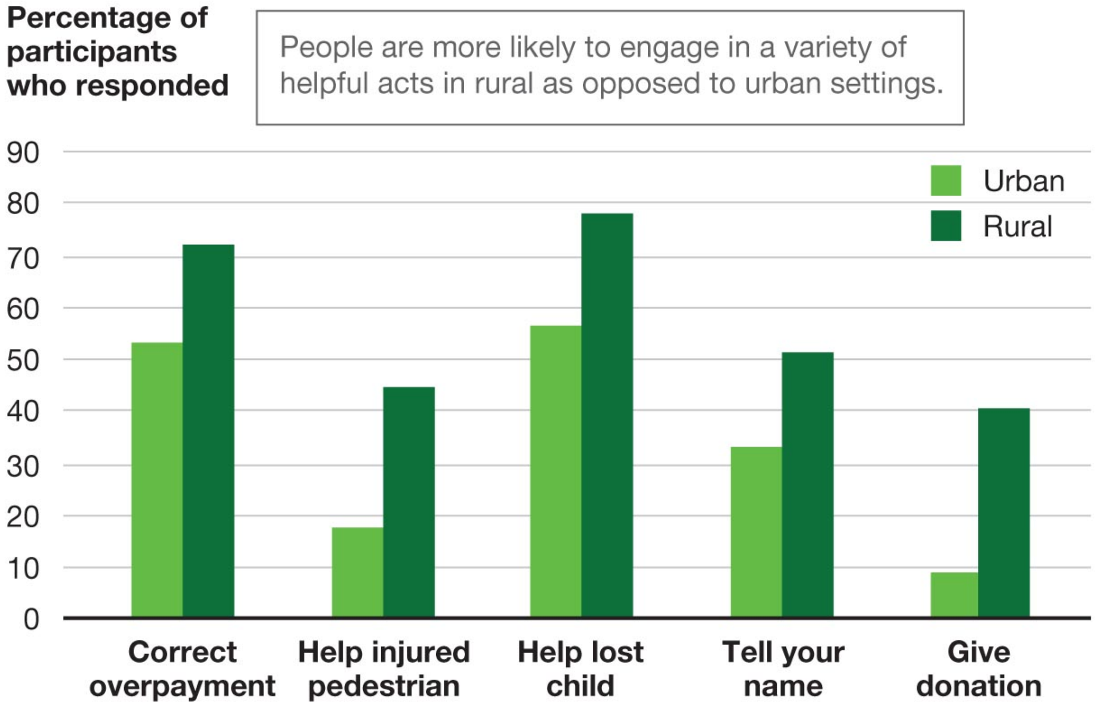


FIGURE 14.3 **ALTRUISM IN RURAL AND URBAN ENVIRONMENTS** People in rural communities are more likely to help others than people in urban settings are. Source: Adapted from Steblay, 1987.

Let’s examine this finding a bit. You might ask which matters most for whether a person is likely to offer help: the person’s current context or the context in which the person was brought up. For example, if you were brought up in a small rural town but currently live in a big city, which setting is more likely to influence whether you will help someone in need? As it turns out, the current situation wins—hands down. In analyzing the 35 studies, Steblay found that the participant’s current context, rural or urban, was a much stronger predictor of helping behavior than the person’s rural or urban background (Steblay, 1987). This finding is another nod to the power of the current situation.

What accounts for this rural-urban difference in helping rates? Researchers have offered four explanations. Milgram (1970) attributed it to stimulus overload. The amount of stimulation in modern urban environments is so great that no one can register all of it. As you walk down a city street, for example, the traffic, the construction, the swarms of people are, in combination, too much to take in fully. So, you narrow your focus in terms of attention and what circumstances you recognize as having a claim on your thoughts, feelings, and actions. There are simply too many inputs, so you shut down a bit and are less likely to attend to the needs of others and thus less likely to act altruistically.

Membree Ln
HELPS
GOD BLESS

(A)

LATTE ★ SOUPS ★ CROISSANTS ★ COOKIES ★ HOT WRAPS ★ TOASTIES
Start strong. Eat well.
Be BRILLIANT

(B)

HELPING IN THE COUNTRY People living in rural settings (A) are more likely to help others than are people in the city

(B), as shown here in the different responses to people in need.

A second explanation might be labeled the diversity hypothesis. Earlier, we noted that people are more likely to help others who are similar to themselves. Urban areas, of course, are made up of more diverse populations. Thus, on average, you’ re more likely to encounter someone similar to yourself in a rural environment than you are in an urban environment, which may contribute to the observed rural-urban difference in helping rates. A third explanation is that more people are generally around to help in urban areas than in rural environments, so a diffusion of responsibility could discourage people from helping out in urban settings. Finally, it’ s probable that in rural settings, people’ s actions are more likely to be observed by people who know them and who can comment on their reputation to others, thus providing those powerful social rewards that animate prosocial behavior. Later we’ ll learn about the power of reputational concerns as triggers of prosocial behavior.

SOCIAL CLASS AND ALTRUISM In June 2010, Microsoft’ s Bill Gates and investment guru Warren Buffett launched the Giving Pledge, a campaign to encourage the wealthiest people in the world to donate most of their wealth to philanthropic causes. They asked that the richest people in the United States give at least half of their wealth to charity. Buffett, a billionaire, pledged to give away 99 percent of his fortune by the end of his life.

How does socioeconomic status influence levels of altruism? Are the Gateses and Buffetts of the world the rule—or the exception to the rule? When it comes to altruism, it turns out that those who have less give more, at least in terms of the proportion of their income that they donate to charity. Nationwide surveys of charitable giving in the United States have found that wealthy individuals give away smaller proportions of their income to charity than people who are less well-off do (Greve, 2009). For example, a study by the organization Independent Sector (2002) found that people making less than $25,000 per year gave away an average of 4.2 percent of their income, whereas those making more than $100,000 per year donated only 2.7 percent. It would seem, then, that people like Gates and Buffett are exceptions.

WEALTH AND CHARITY Nicki Minaj has an extensive engagement with her philanthropy and has helped pay students' debts and given money to a village in India.

The research on empathic concern and altruism sheds light on why people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may give more than those with greater wealth and education do. Specifically, Michael Kraus, Paul Piff, and their colleagues reason that a relative scarcity of resources leads individuals to be more empathically attuned to others and to build strong relationships that help them adapt to their more unpredictable and threatening environments (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011; see also Guinote et al., 2015). Wealthier people, by contrast, enjoy more abundant resources and opportunities that enable them to be more independent but less empathically in tune with others. In keeping with this theorizing, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds prove to be more empathic than people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds in a variety of ways: They’re better judges of the emotions of a stranger with whom they’ve just interacted, they’re better judges of a friend’s emotions, they’re more accurate in their inferences about the emotions revealed in photographs (Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010), and they respond with greater empathic concern and compassion-related physiology to the suffering of others (Stellar et al., 2012).

> “Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.”
>
> -MATTHEW 19:24

Given these differences in empathy, are people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds more likely to act in a prosocial fashion? Piff and his colleagues have found that they are indeed more altruistic (Piff et al., 2010). In one study, for example, people from different socioeconomic backgrounds played the dictator game, an economic game in which they received 10 points and were asked to give some portion of those points to a stranger. The number of points the participants had at the end of the experiment determined their chances in a lottery conducted after all participants had completed the study. On average, participants gave away 41 percent of their points, and participants from lower socioeconomic backgrounds gave away more of their points than did individuals born into circumstances of greater wealth and education. Subsequent research has found that in contexts of high economic inequality, the wealthy share even less (Côté, House, & Willer, 2015) or choose to share mainly with other wealthy individuals, only augmenting levels of economic inequality (Nishi et al., 2015). During the COVID pandemic, Christian Elbaek and his colleagues surveyed more than 46,000 individuals from 67 countries around the world, asking participants to report on how important moral concerns are to their identity, how many people they include within their “moral circle” of individuals they feel compassion and empathic concern for, and how likely they are to give altruistically (Elbaek et al., 2021). Across 67 countries, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds rated morals as more important, reported larger groups of individuals within their moral circle, and reported a greater willingness to give.

What, then, might counteract these tendencies and encourage those who have more to give more? One clear answer is to trigger empathic concern in wealthy people. In one study guided by this idea, participants were given the chance to help an obviously distressed confederate who had arrived late for the experiment and therefore needed the participant’s assistance to complete required tasks (Piff et al., 2010). Before this opportunity to provide help, participants watched either a neutral film clip (a relatively uninteresting scene from the movie *All the President’s Men*) or a moving portrayal of the suffering of children living in poverty.

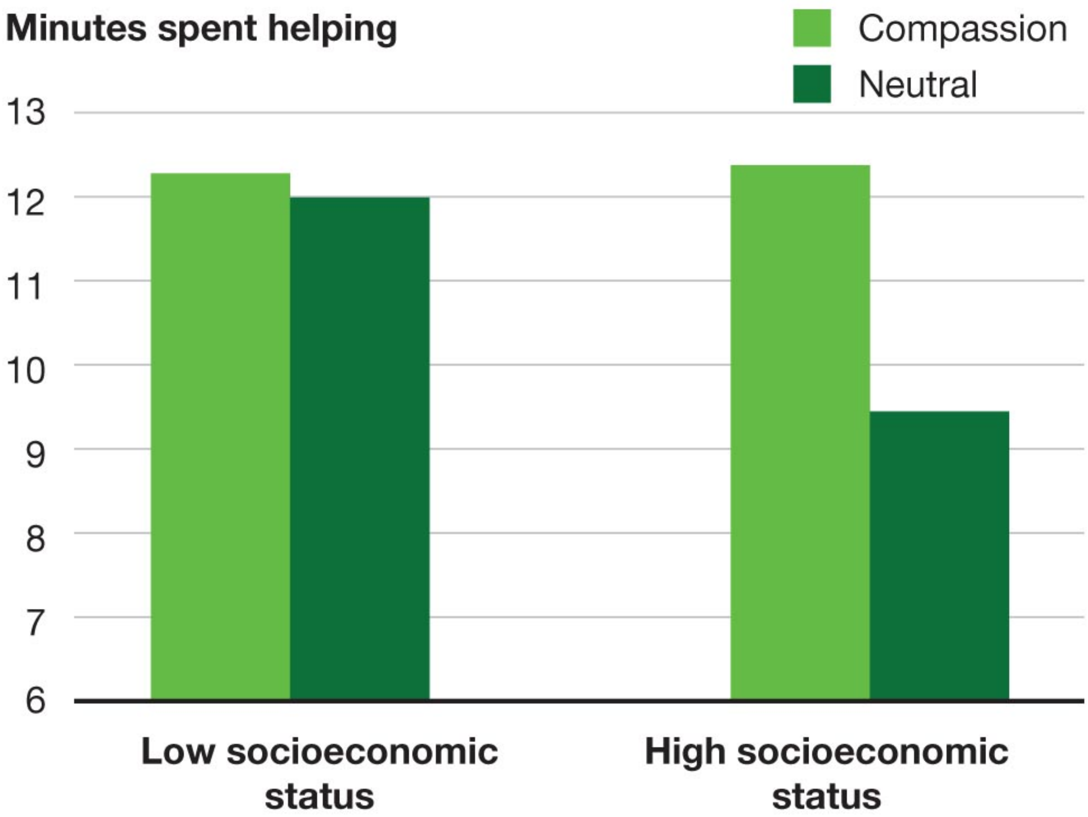


FIGURE 14.4 **SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND ALTRUISM** This study demonstrated that people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds help more than people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds do, except when both groups are made to feel compassion. Source: Piff et al., 2010.

Showing the film about poor children was intended to induce participants from higher socioeconomic backgrounds to feel the same level of empathic concern typical of individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, which the investigators predicted would lead them to help at higher rates than they otherwise would have. The findings supported these predictions, as shown in **Figure 14.4**: After watching the neutral film clip, participants from lower socioeconomic backgrounds offered to spend more time helping the confederate than did participants from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. When individuals from backgrounds of greater wealth and education were made to feel compassion, however, they responded in the same prosocial fashion as their counterparts from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

RELIGION, ETHICS, AND ALTRUISM There are hundreds, if not thousands, of religions in the world today, and many people define themselves in terms of the one they follow—Muslims, Protestants, Jews, Catholics, Mormons, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, and so on. Many others who don’t have a religious affiliation are spiritual people who believe in forces that transcend the physical laws of nature. Like social class, religion can shape almost every facet of social life, ranging from moral beliefs to marriage partners.

The world’s major religions emphasize compassion, altruism, and treating others, even strangers and adversaries, with kindness. This conduct is seen in such religious practices as tithing and tending to those who suffer as well as in moral codes such as the golden rule—treating others as we would like to be treated ourselves—which is echoed in the texts of the major religions (**Table 14.1**). Admittedly, many of the world’s religions also include stories of taking revenge, putting people to death for seemingly trivial offenses, and treating nonbelievers in cruel ways. Still, all religions do stress compassion and the need to treat others—at least some others—well.

TABLE 14.1 THE GOLDEN RULE ACROSS CULTURES AND RELIGIONS

Christianity	“In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” (Christian Bible)
Pythagoreanism	“What you wish your neighbors to be to you, you will also be to them.” (Sentences of Sextus)

Buddhism	“Whatever is disagreeable to yourself, do not do unto others.” (The Buddha)
Tibetan Buddhism	“If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.” (Dalai Lama)
Hinduism	“One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one’s own self.” (Mahabharata)
Islam	“Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you.” (Quran)
Daoism	“He is kind to the kind; he is also kind to the unkind.” (Tao te Ching)

Does exposure to religious concepts make people more prosocial? Initial studies by Ara Norenzayan and Azim Shariff suggest so (Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008; Shariff et al., 2016). In one study, participants were shown sequences of five words, randomly arranged, and asked to generate sentences using four of those five words. In a religion prime condition, the five words always included at least one word with religious meaning, such as *spirit*, *divine*, *God*, *sacred*, or *prophet*. For example, in this condition participants might read “Felt she eradicate the spirit” and create the sentence “She felt the spirit.” In a neutral prime condition, participants did the same task of unscrambling sentences, but none of the words had religious meaning. After this task, participants in both conditions then received 10 Canadian dollars and were asked to give some amount away to a stranger. **Figure 14.5** shows the powerful effect of being primed by religious concepts like “divine” or “sacred.” Participants in the neutral prime condition were more than twice as likely to give nothing to a stranger compared with those in the religion prime condition (36 percent versus 16 percent). By contrast, people who were primed with religious concepts were more than 4 times as likely to treat a stranger as an equal by giving half of the money to the stranger (52 percent versus 12 percent). Subsequent studies inspired by this work have shown that different kinds of religious priming—reporting on personal religious beliefs, reading passages from religious texts, hearing the Islamic call to prayer in the background, even standing near religious buildings—also increase various prosocial behaviors (Shariff et al., 2016).

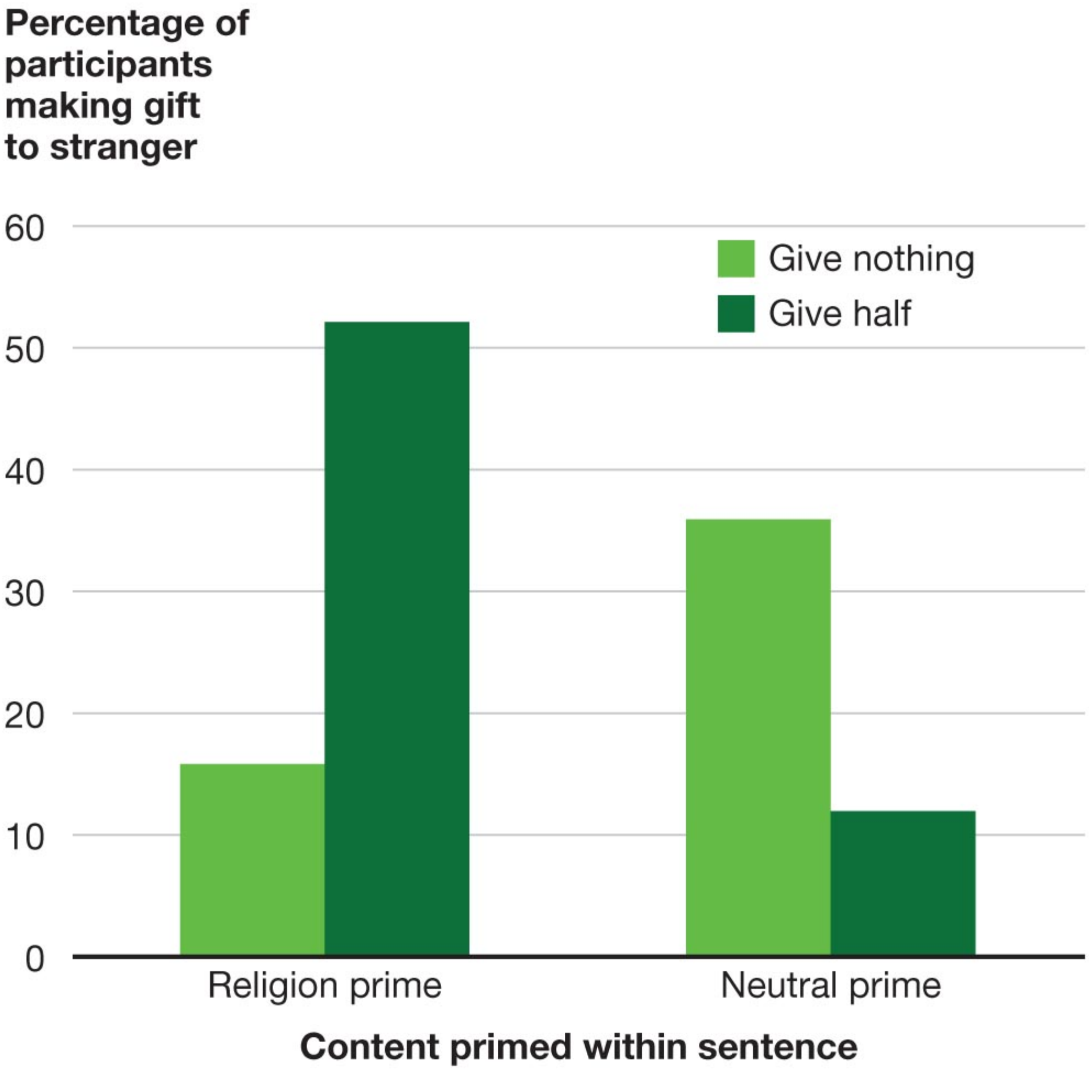


FIGURE 14.5 **RELIGION AND ALTRUISM** As this study showed, being primed with religious concepts leads to greater generosity. Source: Adapted from Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008.

What about secular ideas related to being a good citizen and community member that one might learn from parents, hear about in school, or read about in philosophy or psychology texts (or even in this chapter)? Shariff and Norenzayan examined whether nonreligious concepts related to civility and ethical behavior can generate similar levels of generosity (Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007). In what they called a “civic” condition, participants unscrambled sentences that included words related to the secular institutions and ideas that build more cooperative societies, such as *civic*, *jury*, *court*, *police*, and *contract*. These words also generated high levels of generosity in the economic game—as much generosity, in fact, as the religious words did. It seems that an emphasis on fairness, cooperation, equality, seen in both religious traditions and secular treatments of ethics, can do a great deal to elicit prosocial behavior.

Shinobu Kitayama and his colleagues have gathered evidence showing that the sense of being watched, so prominent in religions of different kinds, can increase altruism. In one relevant study, participants were given a sum of money and asked to write down on a sheet of paper the amount they wanted to give to a stranger (Rigdon et al., 2009). On the paper, they saw one of two sets of dots, shown in **Figure 14.6**. In one condition, participants saw a pattern of three dots arranged to suggest the eyes and mouth of a human face (the pattern on the left). In a second condition, participants saw the same dots but configured upside-down (the pattern on the right). When presented with the non-face dots on the response sheet, 40 percent of the participants decided to keep all the money for themselves. This selfish tendency dropped to 25 percent when the dots representing the face were on the response sheet.

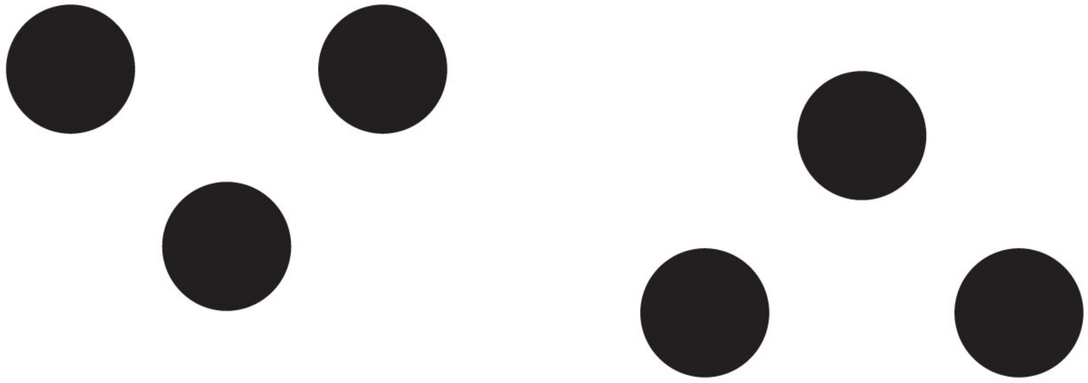


FIGURE 14.6 **BEING WATCHED** A simple triangular arrangement of dots reminiscent of the human face (the three dots to the left) is associated with a sense of being observed and

encourages cooperation more than a triangular arrangement that does not evoke the human face (the three dots to the right).

Evolution and Altruism

Few behaviors are more difficult to explain from an evolutionary perspective than altruism. Natural selection favors behaviors that increase the likelihood of survival and reproduction. Altruistic behavior, by its very nature, is costly, directing precious resources to others that could be used for oneself or one’s genetic relatives. The costs of altruism can even include the ultimate sacrifice, as when people risk their lives to save the lives of friends or total strangers. How, then, have evolutionary theorists accounted for altruistic behavior? Two evolutionary explanations have been offered: kin selection and reciprocity (Fehr & Rockenbach, 2004).

KIN SELECTION Kin selection is an evolutionary strategy that favors behaviors that increase the chance of survival of genetic relatives (W. D. Hamilton, 1964). From the perspective of kin selection, people should be more likely to help those who share more of their genes—for example, by helping siblings more than first cousins, first cousins more than second cousins, and so on. By helping relatives survive, people help their own genes pass to future generations.

In keeping with kin selection theory, studies of several nonhuman species have found that helping is more likely to be directed toward kin than toward non-kin. Mockingbirds feed their own hungry nestlings first and then will feed hungry nestlings that are not their own but that are more closely related to them than other hungry nestlings are (Curry, 1988). When ground squirrels sense that a predatory coyote or weasel is in the vicinity, they are more likely to emit alarm calls (thus putting themselves in danger) to warn a genetic relative or a squirrel they have lived with than to warn unrelated squirrels or squirrels from other areas (P. W. Sherman, 1985).

> “A chicken is only an egg’s way of making another egg.”
>
> –SAMUEL BUTLER, *LIFE AND HABIT*

> “An organism is a gene’s way of making another gene.”
>
> –RICHARD DAWKINS

In humans, genetic relatedness influences helping behavior as well. Across many cultures, people report receiving more help from close kin than from more distant relatives or nonrelatives (Essock-Vitale & McGuire, 1985). When hypothetical situations are described to them, people report being more willing to help close relatives (especially those young enough to have children) than to help more distantly related people or strangers (Burnstein, Crandall, & Kitayama, 1994). In a study of kidney donations, donors were about 3 times as likely to engage in this altruistic act for a relative (73 percent) than for nonrelatives (27 percent; Borgida, Conner, & Manteufel, 1992). In a puzzle task that required cooperation, identical twins, who share all their genes, were found to cooperate about twice as often (94 percent) as fraternal twins (46 percent), who share only half of their genes (Segal, 1984; see also Burnstein, 2005).

BOX 14.1

FOCUS ON CULTURE

Prosocial Behavior and the Sense of Being Watched

Common to many religions is the idea that God is watching over people as they carry on with their mundane lives on Earth. The Greeks believed that their gods guided their everyday actions. The same is true for many Christians today, who feel they are being watched by God. And in many religions, this idea of being observed translates directly into religious iconography and architecture. For example, if you travel to Nepal and visit its temples, such as the fifth-century BCE temple Swayambhunath, you’ll have the distinct impression of being watched because of the prominence of the eyes on the surface. You might have a similar experience when viewing the famous ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, painted by Michelangelo, in the Vatican in Rome. There, if you look up into the center of the ceiling, you’ll see God looking down on Adam and Eve in one of the best-known works of art from the Renaissance.

THE SWAYAMBHUNATH TEMPLE The eyes painted at the top of the dome give visitors the feeling they’ re being watched.

RECIPROCITY How would an evolutionary account make sense of helping non-kin? We often go to great lengths to help friends.

We give them money, let them sleep at our apartment and eat out of our refrigerator, help them move, and sometimes even risk our lives for them. Even more compelling, perhaps, is how often we help total strangers. People will dive into icy waters to save people they’ve never met, donate money anonymously to charities, and engage in all sorts of more ordinary, less costly behaviors, such as giving up a seat on a bus or taking the time to help someone cross a street. Such actions can be accounted for in part by reciprocity and cooperation, which form the basis of the second major evolutionary explanation for altruism, which we consider in detail in the next section.

LOOKING BACK

Altruistic tendencies are behaviors that benefit others. People may be driven to act altruistically by selfish motives, such as reducing distress or gaining social rewards, but some acts of altruism are based on a more selfless state of empathic concern. Situational determinants influence whether or not people help others. The presence of bystanders may lead to a diffusion of responsibility in which everyone assumes that someone else will help. People are more likely to help similar others. Construal processes also influence helping, and pluralistic ignorance can lead people to be less likely to help. People are more likely to help if they’re from rural rather than urban settings or from lower rather than higher socioeconomic backgrounds. One evolutionary concept that can account for the existence of altruism is kin selection.

Glossary

altruism

Prosocial behavior that benefits others without regard to the consequences for oneself.

social reward

A benefit, such as praise, positive attention, something tangible, or gratitude, that may be gained from helping others and thus serves as a motive for altruistic behavior.

personal distress

A motive for helping others in distress that may arise from a need to reduce one’s own distress.

empathic concern

Identifying with someone in need, including feeling and understanding what that person is experiencing, accompanied by the intention to help the person.

volunteerism

Assistance a person regularly provides to another person or group with no expectation of compensation.

bystander intervention

Assistance given by a witness to someone in need.

diffusion of responsibility

A reduction of the sense of urgency to help someone in an emergency or dangerous situation based on the assumption that others who are present will help.

kin selection

An evolutionary strategy that favors the reproductive success of one’s genetic relatives, even at a cost to one’s own survival and reproduction.

Cooperation

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

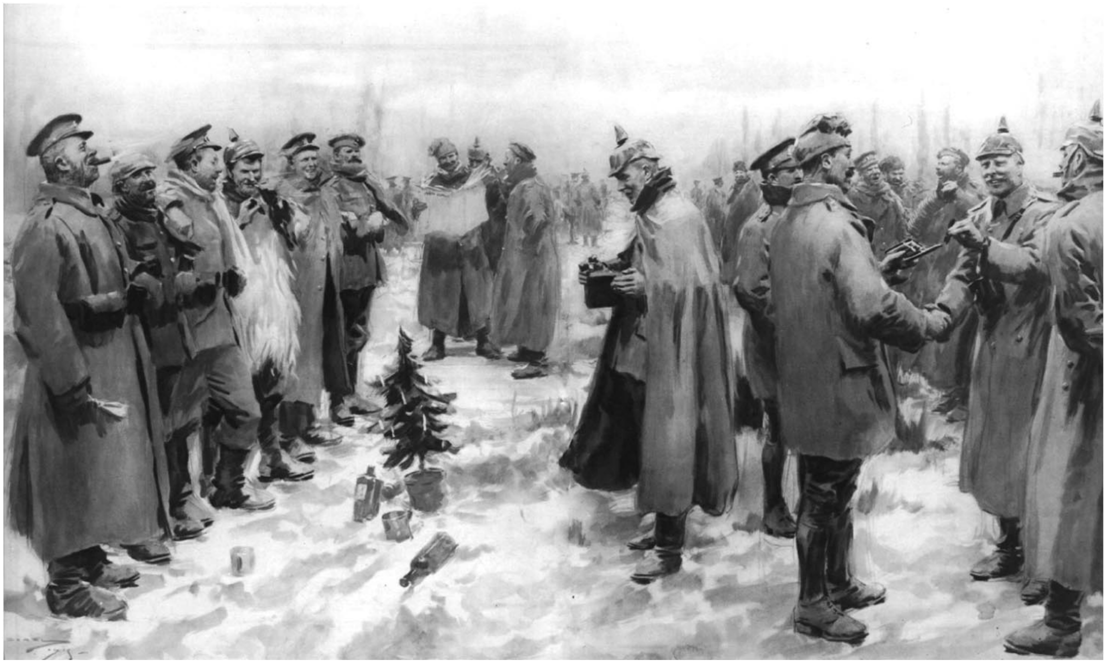
- Explain how evolutionary theory accounts for the surprising acts of reciprocity and cooperation observed in nonhuman species.
- List two contextual factors that can influence the likelihood of cooperation.
- Describe the tit-for-tat strategy and explain why it is successful in social life.

Cooperating with others is part of our evolutionary heritage. Our profoundly vulnerable and dependent offspring, who have a long period of complete reliance on adults for food and protection, have always required cooperative child care; both parents share the burdens of raising children who are entirely dependent on them (Hrdy, 1999; Konner, 2003). From archaeological studies of the bones of animals our hominid predecessors killed for food, we know that early humans hunted in cooperative groups (Mithen, 1996). The inclination to cooperate for common goals is a defining attribute of humans.

One of the most striking aspects of human relations is how quickly adversarial relationships can become cooperative (and vice versa). In World War II, for example, Germany and Japan were the mortal enemies of the United States. Shortly after the end of the war, the United States became strong allies with these two countries. During the Rwandan genocide, Hutus sought to annihilate Tutsis; since then, the two groups have become more collaborative. How readily people shift from competition and aggression to cooperation is an important lesson of history.

Reciprocity and Cooperation

In traditional, preliterate societies, individuals living in groups were best able to survive when they cooperated with one another. To explain how cooperation evolved, evolutionary theorists generally rely on the concept of reciprocal altruism—helping other people with the expectation that they'll help in return at some other time (Trivers, 1971). Cooperation among non-kin provides many benefits that increase the chances of survival and reproduction for all. Reciprocal altruism reduces the likelihood of dangerous conflict, helps overcome problems arising from scarce resources, and offers a mechanism though which people can form alliances and constrain more dominant individuals (Preston & de Waal, 2002).



COOPERATION BETWEEN WARTIME ENEMIES During World War I, instances of cooperation took place between enemy soldiers, as during this informal Christmas truce in 1914. Soldiers from both sides emerged from their trenches and fraternized in no-man’s-land. This lithograph was published in 1915.

There’s some evidence in nonhuman species for the mutual helping that’s the essence of reciprocal altruism. Vampire bats need blood meals to survive and may starve to death if they don’t have a blood meal after 60 hours. Researchers have found that satiated bats will regurgitate blood to feed bats that have given to them in the past but won’t donate to a bat that hasn’t been a donor itself (Wilkinson, 1990). In his observations of chimpanzees and bonobos, Frans de Waal (1996) has found that primates are disposed to share food with other primates who share with them, to look after each other’s offspring, and to systematically groom other primates who have groomed them earlier (see also Silk et al., 2013).

RECIPROCAL ALTRUISM Vampire bats will regurgitate blood to feed starving bats that have given blood to them in the past, but they will not give blood to bats that haven't previously helped them. Thus, reciprocally altruistic behavior is observed in nonhuman species as well as in humans.

The impulse to reciprocate acts of generosity is a likely human universal (Gouldner, 1960). In hunter-gatherer societies around the world, meat gained from hunts is carefully divided up and shared with others on the assumption that present acts of generosity will be paid back at some later date (Flannery & Marcus, 2012). In studies using games where players can either cooperate or compete with one another, people are more likely to seek out and cooperate with individuals who have cooperated on the previous round of the game (Rand, Arbesman, & Christakis, 2011).

FOOD SHARING In cultures around the world, people build and maintain cooperative relationships by sharing food.

These women in China share a communal lunch and enjoy the delights of such an exchange.

Perhaps an even more dramatic illustration of our tendency to reciprocate is the following experiment. Researchers mailed Christmas cards to numerous complete strangers. About 20 percent reciprocated by sending their own Christmas cards back to the senders, whom they had never met (Kunz & Woolcott, 1976). Either the participants had too few friends to accommodate the stacks of Christmas cards they’d bought or they felt compelled by the norm of reciprocity to respond with a Christmas card to the sender.

Adam Grant and Francesca Gino have made the case that expressions of gratitude for altruistic acts are powerful social rewards that can trigger subsequent cooperation, which fits the reciprocal altruism thesis. More specifically, they propose that recipients of acts of appreciation or gratitude feel socially valued, as if they have received a gift. Feeling thus rewarded, recipients should be more inclined to continue to behave altruistically in the future. In one relevant study, participants helped an experimenter edit a letter online (Grant & Gino, 2010). In the gratitude condition, participants were thanked via email. In the control condition, participants received a polite message of equal length, but without a note of thanks. When asked if they would help the experimenter edit a second letter, those who were thanked responded affirmatively 66 percent of the time compared with 32 percent in the control condition.

The Prisoner’s Dilemma

Alongside evolutionary accounts of reciprocity and cooperation, a second approach to the questions of how and why humans cooperate is an experimental paradigm known as the prisoner’s dilemma, often structured as a type of economic game. Imagine you are ushered into a small cubicle, and the experimenter tells you there’s another participant (whom you’ll never meet) in a cubicle nearby. Both you and the other participant must make a simple decision: Independently, you must choose to either “cooperate” with each other (do what will benefit both of you) or “defect” (do what will disproportionately benefit only you). The compensation you receive will depend on the choices you make. If both of you cooperate, you’ll each receive $5. If both of you defect, you’ll each get $2. If one cooperates and the other defects, the defector will receive $8 and the cooperator will not receive anything. The experimenter says you’ll be paid as soon as each of you makes your choice and reiterates that you and the other person will never meet. What do you do?

To maximize your own self-interest, the best, or “rational,” choice is to defect. Whatever your partner does, you make more money by defecting than by cooperating. To see this, consult the summary of payoffs presented in **Figure 14.7**. If your partner cooperates, you receive $8 by defecting but only $5 by cooperating. If your partner defects, you receive $2 by defecting and nothing by cooperating. Defection thus “dominates” cooperation. So why not defect?

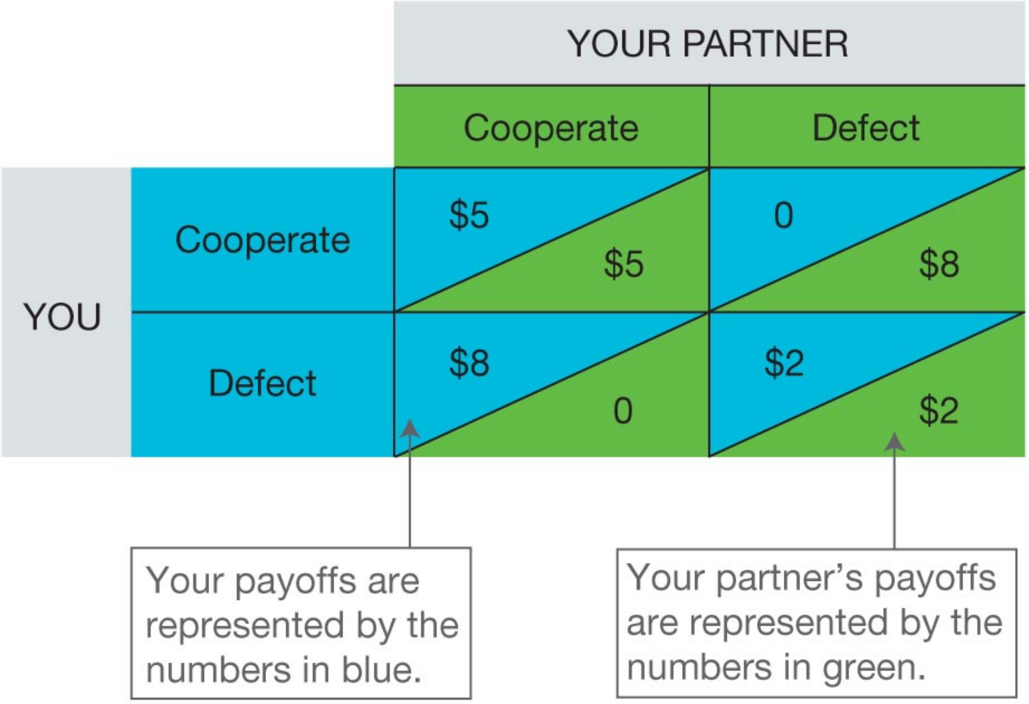

YOUR PARTNER
Cooperate
Defect
YOU
Cooperate
Defect
$5
$5
0
$8
$8
0
$2
$2
Your payoffs are represented by the numbers in blue.
Your partner's payoffs are represented by the numbers in green.

FIGURE 14.7 **THE PAYOFF MATRIX FOR THE PRISONER’S DILEMMA GAME**

Here’s the catch: If both players reason this way and choose to defect, they both receive only $2 rather than the $5 they would have earned through mutual cooperation. The “best” choice for each person (defection) is a terrible choice from the standpoint of the two people in combination.

On the surface, the prisoner’s dilemma game seems to hold little promise for learning anything significant about real human interaction. Unlike many real-world situations, the game offers no range of cooperative to competitive behaviors to choose from; instead, there are only two—cooperate or defect. In addition, participants aren’t allowed to discuss the choices beforehand, and they are never permitted to explain or justify them afterward. Overall, it seems too limited, too artificial, to demonstrate anything significant about real-world cooperation and competition.

Looks may be deceiving, however. As simple as the prisoner’ s dilemma seems, it nevertheless captures the essential features of many significant situations in life (Dawes, 1980; Schelling, 1978). Let’ s consider a real-world analogue. India and Pakistan have been engaged in an arms race for decades. Like nearly all such struggles, the contest is ultimately futile because its structure is that of the prisoner’ s dilemma. Each country must decide whether to spend more money on armaments or to stop spending on more arms and enjoy a significant economic “peace dividend,” as the United States did following the breakup of the Soviet Union. However, regardless of what the other does, it’ s “better” for each country to acquire more arms. In this case, acquiring more arms is akin to choosing to defect in the prisoner’ s dilemma. If India freezes its acquisition of weapons, Pakistan can achieve an edge by spending more. If India builds up its arsenal, Pakistan has to spend more to avoid vulnerability. Nonetheless, because each side quickly matches the new weapons systems developed by the other, the net effect is waste. The two countries pay dearly for a military balance that was attainable for less expense.

Thus, although the prisoner’ s dilemma may seem like a sterile and artificial paradigm on the surface, it captures many difficult real-world choices between cooperation and competition. Thousands of studies using the prisoner’ s dilemma game have yielded some valuable insights about how people make these choices, illuminating when and why people or groups or countries are likely to defect or cooperate and suggesting what might be done to foster cooperative relations.

BOX 14.2

FOCUS ON NEUROSCIENCE

The Cooperative Brain

Cooperation is vital to human survival, but as a social strategy it can incur certain costs. For example, when we cooperate, we also risk being exploited by others. In addition, the rewards of cooperation are often delayed rather than immediate, as when we cooperate with colleagues on a long-term project. James Rilling and his colleagues have found that the brain may be wired to enable cooperation despite these kinds of uncertainties (Rilling et al., 2002). They have shown that during acts of cooperation, patterns of neurons in our brain activate in the same way they do when we receive rewards.

In Rilling and colleagues' study, 36 women played an online version of the prisoner's dilemma game with another person. Using fMRI technology, the researchers scanned the brains of the participating women when they cooperated with the online stranger—which was their most common choice. They found that reward-related regions of the brain (the nucleus accumbens, ventral caudate, and ventromedial/orbitofrontal cortex) exhibited increased activation when the women cooperated. These brain regions are rich in dopamine receptors and are activated by all sorts of rewards, such as sweet tastes, pleasant smells, pictures of tropical vacations, and pleasing touches. Parallel findings have been obtained in nonhuman species in the way dopaminergic regions of the brain relate to cooperative behaviors (O'Connell & Hofmann, 2011). Cooperation, it seems, is inherently rewarding.

Situational Determinants of Cooperation

The prisoner’s dilemma game sets up the simplest of situations: Participants are involved in just one round with someone they don’t know and can’t even see. Of course, our social lives are much more complex. In real life, we often interact repeatedly over time with certain people—for example, in our careers or in our personal relationships. Are we more cooperative when we interact repeatedly with the same person compared with when we interact with someone only once? Indeed we are. David Rand and Martin Nowak have reviewed numerous studies that varied the number of rounds two people played in the prisoner’s dilemma game. The evidence is clear: As the likelihood of interacting with someone in the future rises, we become more cooperative (Rand & Nowak, 2013).

In real life, we also interact with people face-to-face, allowing us access to various cues about them. A variety of studies have suggested that we study others’ nonverbal behavior in search of cues that signal that an individual is likely to cooperate; once we detect those cues, they trigger cooperation on our part in turn. For example, in situations like the prisoner’s dilemma game, people are more likely to cooperate with another person who smiles in a friendly fashion, laughs warmly, has a trustworthy-looking face, listens to others attentively, and has a physical appearance that resembles their own (Bachorowski & Owren, 2001; DeBruine, 2002; Kogan et al., 2011; Stirrat & Perrett, 2010). In a similar vein, people also trust and devote resources to individuals who cooperate quickly and reflexively and in ways that seem spontaneous rather than calculated and strategic (Jordan et al., 2016).

DEVELOPING COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS Cooperation can emerge between the most violent of enemies and in the most extreme circumstances. Here, members of two rival gangs in El Salvador, MS-13 and 18th Street, stand next to each other in a spirit of cooperation created by a truce signed a year earlier.

In daily life, we also tend to interact with people we know and whose reputations we know from others. Reputation refers to the collective beliefs, evaluations, and impressions about an individual’s character that develop within a group or social network (Emler, 1994; Jazaieri et al., 2019). Studies of people at work find that they quickly develop reputations for being good citizens (cooperators) or “bad apples” (defectors) and that these reputations spread through the organization and persist over time (Burt, Kilduff, & Tasselli, 2013). Very often, when you interact with someone—say, in a dorm or at work—you’re likely to know a bit about that person’s reputation. Does such knowledge influence levels of cooperation?

To answer this question, some researchers have added a twist to the prisoner’s dilemma game: Before playing, participants are told about their partner’s reputation of being someone who cooperates or defects. As you’d expect, participants will readily cooperate and give resources to an interaction partner who has a reputation for cooperation, but they’ll defect and choose not to give resources to an interaction partner known to be greedy (Wedekind & Milinski, 2000).

These findings raise an intriguing question: How do we come to know one another’s reputations? One idea is that reputations spread through gossiping—something that most people are reluctant to admit doing but often enjoy when they do. Gossip can be defined as a communicative act in which one person comments on the reputation of another who is not present (Feinberg et al., 2012). One of the primary reasons we gossip is to get a sense of other people’s reputations. Through gossip, we investigate whether other group members are inclined to act in ways that strengthen the group (for example, by being civil, fair, and cooperative) or in ways that might create friction and ill will. This analysis yields what might seem like a counterintuitive prediction—that groups in which gossip takes place might actually be more cooperative. And indeed, that’s what Matthew Feinberg and his colleagues have found.

In Feinberg and colleagues’ study, participants played an economic game in which they could give some money to other people in their group (Feinberg, Willer, & Schultz, 2014). In one condition, they were allowed to gossip about each other’s generosity (or lack thereof). In a second condition, they had no such opportunity to gossip. Over the course of several iterations, the groups whose members could gossip became more cooperative than the groups who weren’t allowed to gossip. The threat of gossip makes people aware of what might happen to their reputations should they choose to act selfishly, thus encouraging more cooperative behavior.

"It takes many good deeds to build a good reputation, and only one bad one to lose it."

-BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Construal Processes and Cooperation

Our construals of events and situations matter a great deal in shaping interactions toward more cooperative or more competitive outcomes. In particular, how we explicitly label situations can influence levels of competition and cooperation. If we think of international crises as buildups to war, diplomatic solutions may become less likely. When lawyers treat divorce settlements as adversarial and as opportunities to get their client the best outcome at the expense of the estranged spouse, entrenched bitterness seems inevitable.

In a striking demonstration of the power of labels, Varda Liberman, Steven Samuels, and Lee Ross (2002) conducted a study in which they labeled the prisoner's dilemma game in one of two ways. Half the participants were told they were going to play the "Wall Street" game, and the other half were told it was the "community" game. Everything else about the experiment was the same for the two groups. What might seem to be a trivial change of labels had a dramatic effect on the participants' behavior. Those playing the community game cooperated on the opening round twice as often as those playing the Wall Street game did. Moreover, these initial differences were maintained throughout the subsequent rounds of the experiment. The Wall Street label doubtless made the participants adopt a perspective that emphasized maximizing their own profits. In contrast, the community label conjured up a different set of images and motives that increased the appeal of maximizing the participants’ joint outcomes.

BOX 14.3

Not So Fast: **Critical Thinking About Generalizing to the Real World**

Much of our discussion about cooperation has come from studies using the prisoner’s dilemma and related games, such as the dictator game (collectively known as economic games). If you’re skeptical about the external validity of these games—that is, the extent to which they generalize to cooperative behavior outside the lab—you’re not alone.

Critics describe three kinds of doubts about the external validity of economic games (Levitt & List, 2007). First are the stakes involved: People are given money for cooperating or defecting, or they give away money that’s been given to them in an experiment. People are dealing with “play” money and not actual money they’ve earned, which raises the question of whether we would observe similar patterns of cooperation when the money is real, earned, and costly to sacrifice. Second, critics suggest that being in a laboratory makes norms of cooperative behavior more salient. Simply signing up for an experiment, getting there on time, and following instructions from an experimenter are all acts guided by norms of cooperation, again suggesting that patterns of cooperation observed in the lab may diverge from those out in the real world. Third, in lab studies, people are acutely aware of being scrutinized, and scrutiny strengthens the likelihood of cooperative behavior.

The best response to concerns about the external validity of a paradigm is twofold. First, researchers can ask whether behavior that is observed in the lab, such as cooperation in the prisoner’ s dilemma game, predicts actual behavior out in the world. On this question, evidence is mounting that a person’ s behavior in economic games does indeed predict forms of charity and working to help others (Levitt & List, 2007). In one study, participants first played the dictator game (Franzen & Pointner, 2013). They were given 10 Euros, and then they chose an amount to give, anonymously, to a stranger. Some four or five weeks later, participants got a letter that was addressed to them. When they opened the envelope, however, they discovered a letter to another student, Alexander, whom they didn’ t know. The letter was allegedly from Alexander’ s grandmother, congratulating him on doing well academically. Inside the envelope were 10 Euros and Alexander’ s correct address, which gave participants the opportunity to mail the misdirected letter to Alexander. Did the amount the participants shared in the dictator game four weeks earlier predict whether or not they would take time out of their day and mail the letter to Alexander? Indeed it did. People who gave more in the dictator game were more likely to return the misdirected letter.

A second way to address concerns about the external validity of economic games is with field experiments that seek to replicate findings observed in the lab.

Recall that field experiments are studies conducted outside the lab that observe real-world behavior. Here again the evidence supports the principles of cooperation that have been uncovered with economic games. In one study, residents in 15 homeowners' associations were encouraged to sign up for a service that would improve the energy efficiency of their air conditioners (Yoeli et al., 2013). Participants had to sign up on a sheet posted on a kiosk near the mailboxes for the homes or apartments. In one condition, participants wrote their names on the sheet; in a second condition, they signed up with a numerical code. When people are aware of their own reputations, they' re more cooperative in economic games of different kinds. Would this effect of reputation replicate in energy-saving but costly cooperation out in the world? Yes. When participants signed up using their names, they were 3 times more likely to sign up for the service than when they did so anonymously.

BOX 14.4

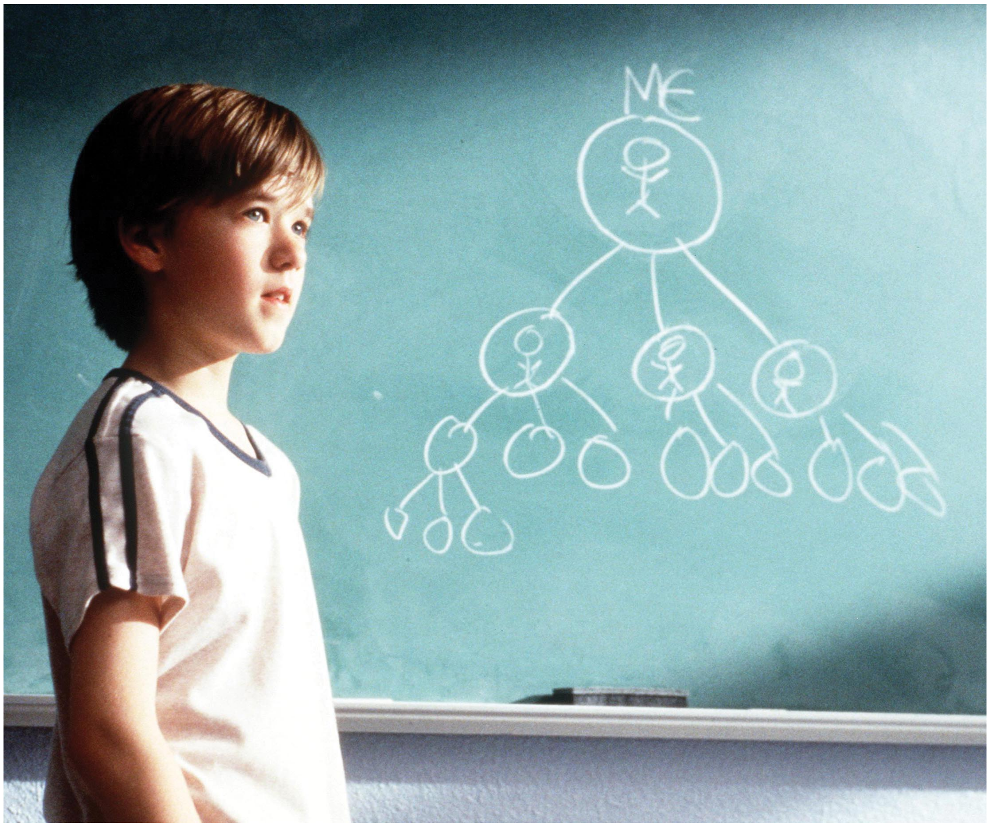
FOCUS ON POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Is Cooperation Contagious?

Popular movies and clever advertisements have used the "pay it forward" concept: When we cooperate, we inspire others to be more cooperative in subsequent situations. Is cooperation contagious? For years, James Fowler and Nicholas Christakis have been gathering evidence on the contagious nature of human behavior and have discovered that smoking, anxiety, happiness, and obesity, for example, spread through communities from one person to another (Christakis & Fowler, 2009). We are a mimetic species, prone to imitating the behaviors of others around us. Using an economic game, Fowler and Christakis found that cooperative acts inspire others to be more cooperative in ensuing situations (Fowler & Christakis, 2010).

In the study, participants played several rounds of an economic game in groups of four; each round involved an entirely new set of participants. In each round, the participant was given 20 money units (MUs) and allowed to give some amount, between 0 and 20, to the group. Each MU the participant gave to the group was translated to an increase of 0.4 MU for each of the four group members. This means that each gift of 1 MU would cost the giver 0.6 MU personally but benefit each other group member. If participants kept all their MUs, they would end the game with 20 MUs. If they each gave all their MUs to the group, each member would end the game with 32 MUs.

This method created the usual dilemma—that behaviors costly to the self are beneficial for the group—and allowed Fowler and Christakis to examine how cooperative gifts to other players by a player in one round might influence those other players’ levels of generosity in subsequent rounds. They found that for every MU a player gave, that player’s partners would give 0.19 MU more on average to a *new* set of players in the next round and 0.07 MU on average to still other players in the round after that, two times removed from the original round.



PAYING IT FORWARD The popular movie *Pay It Forward* focuses on the theme of how one person’s generosity leads to other acts of generosity.

Culture and Cooperation

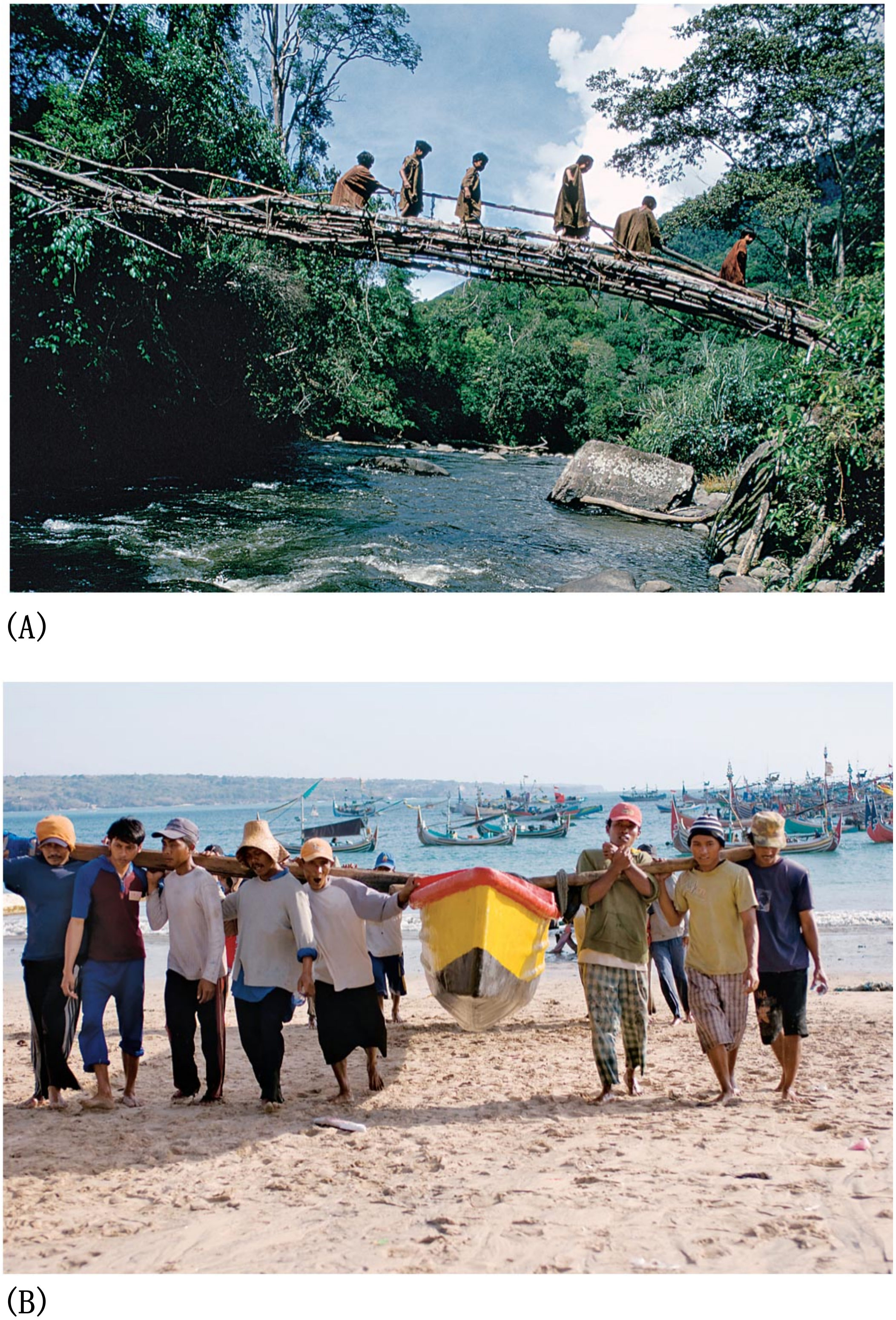
Given how labels—and therefore construals—shape levels of cooperation, you might expect cultural factors to have a similar influence on the inclination to either cooperate or defect. To explore this question, Joseph Henrich and his colleagues recruited individuals from 15 small societies around the world to play the ultimatum game, a close relative of the prisoner’s dilemma game (Henrich et al., 2001). In the original version of the ultimatum game, one player, the allocator, is given a certain amount of money (say, $10) and chooses to keep a certain amount of that $10 and to allocate the rest to a second participant, the responder. The responder can then choose to either accept or reject the allocator’s offer. If the responder accepts the offer, the responder receives what was offered and the allocator keeps the balance. If the responder rejects the offer, neither player receives anything.

The Henrich team conducted a cross-cultural version of the ultimatum game, recruiting participants who were foragers, slash-and-burn farmers, nomadic herders, and individuals in settled agriculturalist societies in Africa, South America, and Indonesia. The good that the participants were allowed to offer an anonymous stranger differed. In some cultures, it was money; in others, it was a cherished item such as tobacco. In all cases, the researchers attempted to make rewards equal to approximately the same fraction of a daily wage in each culture.

The first finding of note was that in the 15 cultures, allocators offered, on average, 39 percent of the good to anonymous strangers. (In other research across Western cultures, nearly three quarters of participants in the role of allocators offered the responder 40–50 percent of the money; E. Fehr & Schmidt, 1999.) Of course, there are strategic reasons for participants making such generous offers that have nothing to do with altruistic tendencies. Most notably, they probably anticipated that the respondent would reject unfair, trivial offers. Nevertheless, these results suggest that people are more cooperative and willing to share than one might expect.

Henrich and his colleagues then looked closely at the 15 cultures to determine what cultural factors predicted the likelihood of cooperative generosity in the ultimatum game (Henrich et al., 2001). One factor stood out: how much the individuals in a culture depended on one another to survive. The more the members of a culture relied on each other to gather food and meet other needs, the more they offered to a stranger when they were allocators in the ultimatum game. For example, the Machiguenga people of Peru rarely collaborate with members outside of their family to produce food. Their average allocation in the ultimatum game was 26 percent of the good. The Lamerala of Indonesia, by contrast, fish in highly collaborative groups of individuals from different families. Cooperation is essential to their livelihood and subsistence. Their average gift in the ultimatum game was 58 percent.

The finding that interdependence fosters cooperation helps explain other cultural influences on cooperation. Consider, for example, that when people are primed to think about religious concepts, they are more likely to cooperate in the prisoner’ s dilemma game (Ahmed & Salas, 2011); people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to endorse cooperative values (Guinote et al., 2015); and in countries plagued by civil war, such as Sierra Leone and Uganda, individuals who have witnessed violence are more likely to cooperate in economic games (Bauer et al., 2016). One could argue that religion, poverty, and exposure to violence each create social conditions in which people must depend on one another to survive and that this interdependence prompts greater cooperation.



COOPERATION IN DIFFERENT CULTURES (A) The Machiguenga of Peru collaborate little with others outside their family and gave little in the ultimatum game. (B) The Lamerala of Indonesia collaborate extensively in fishing and gave a lot.

> “Every individual . . . endeavors as much as he can . . . to employ his capital in the support of domestic industry, and so to direct that industry that its produce may be of greatest value; every individual necessarily labours to render the annual revenue of the society as great as he can. He . . . neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. By . . . directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention.”
>
> －ADAM SMITH, *THE WEALTH OF NATIONS*

In keeping with this thinking, even the discipline you choose to study in college and the degree of interdependence it encourages influence cooperation. Take, for example, one of the most popular majors on many American campuses: economics. Economic theory assumes that people are rational actors who always act in self-interested ways, attempting to maximize their own gains independent of the concerns of others. Some may think that this is a cynical view of the human condition, but in keeping with the ideas of eighteenth-century philosopher Adam Smith, economists have assumed that people and society are best served if individuals are allowed to selfishly pursue their own ends. The storekeeper and restaurateur will succeed to the extent that they serve their patrons well, simultaneously improving their customers’ lives and doing well themselves by charging as much as a competitive market will allow.

Does training in the discipline of economics and its axioms of self-interest and independence encourage people to act more selfishly? The results of several studies indicate that it does (J. R. Carter & Irons, 1991; R. H. Frank, Gilovich, & Regan, 1993; Marwell & Ames, 1981). In one study, undergraduates majoring in economics and those studying a variety of other disciplines participated in a single-trial prisoner’s dilemma game (R. H. Frank et al., 1993). Seventy-two percent of the economics majors defected on their partners, whereas only 47 percent of those majoring in other disciplines defected. In a random sample of more than 1,000 professors in 23 disciplines, participants were asked how much money they gave annually to public television, the United Way, and other charitable causes (R. H. Frank et al., 1993). The economists were twice as likely as all the others to take a free ride on the contributions of their fellow citizens—in other words, giving nothing to charity while presumably enjoying services such as public television to the same extent as everyone else. The subculture in which people are immersed appears to powerfully influence their inclination to either cooperate with others or look only after themselves.

Evolution and Cooperation: Tit for Tat

In *The Evolution of Cooperation* (1984), political scientist Robert Axelrod asked how cooperation might emerge in environments governed by the ruthless pursuit of self-interest. In the context of human evolution, how might non-kin begin to act with an eye toward advancing the welfare of others?

Axelrod assumed that cooperation was part of our evolutionary heritage given its universality and its emergence in even the unlikeliest of social contexts. For example, in the trenches of World War I, British and French soldiers were separated from their enemies, the Germans, by a few hundred yards of no-man’s-land (Axelrod, 1984). Brutal assaults by one side were typically met with equally fierce counterattacks by the other. And yet even here cooperation frequently emerged, allowing soldiers to eat meals peacefully, to enjoy long periods of nonconfrontation, and even to fraternize with one another. The two sides would fly special flags, make verbal agreements, and fire deliberately misguided shots, all to signal and maintain peaceful cooperation between the episodes of attack in which each side was bent on exterminating the other.

Axelrod conducted a study that helped illuminate the evolutionary origins of cooperation. Although simple in design, this study yielded profound lessons. Axelrod ran a tournament in which players—academics, prize-winning mathematicians, computer hackers, and common folk—were invited to submit computer programs that specified what choices to make on a round of the prisoner’s dilemma game given what had happened in previous rounds (Axelrod, 1984). In the first tournament, 14 strategies were submitted. Each strategy played 200 rounds of the prisoner’s dilemma game with every other strategy. The points were tallied, and the most effective strategy was announced. The winner? It was a so-called tit-for-tat strategy submitted by mathematical psychologist Anatol Rapaport.

The tit-for-tat strategy is disarmingly simple. It cooperates on the first round with every opponent and then reciprocates whatever the opponent did on the previous round. An opponent’s cooperation was rewarded with immediate cooperation; defection was punished with immediate defection. In other words, start out cooperatively, and reciprocate your partner’s previous move. Axelrod held a second tournament that attracted the submission of 62 strategies. All the entrants knew the results of the first round—that the tit-for-tat strategy had won. In the second tournament, the tit-for-tat strategy again prevailed. Note that the tit-for-tat strategy didn’t win every round when pitted against all the different strategies. Instead, it did better overall against the diversity of strategies. What makes the tit-for-tat strategy special, and how might it be relevant to your own life?

Axelrod contends that the tit-for-tat strategy is based on a set of valuable principles that apply when forming friendships, dealing with difficult personalities at work, negotiating with bosses, maintaining long-term romantic relationships, and raising children. Five factors make it an especially compelling strategy: (1) It’s cooperative and thus encourages mutually supportive action toward a shared goal. (2) It’s not envious; a partner using this strategy can do extremely well without resorting to competitive behavior. (3) It’s not exploitable, meaning it’s not easily taken advantage of; if you defect on the tit-for-tat, it will defect on you. (4) It’s forgiving; that is, it’s willing to cooperate at the first cooperative action of the partner, even after long runs of defection and competition. (5) It’s easy to read; it shouldn’t take long for others to know that the tit-for-tat strategy is being played. Being nice, stalwart, forgiving, and clear—that’s a good set of principles to live by.

LOOKING BACK

Cooperation is part of our evolutionary heritage. The prisoner’s dilemma game models the many situations in everyday life when defection is the best solution for each person separately but cooperation benefits the two together. Situational factors, such as the likelihood of repeated interactions and whether your reputation is on the line, influence levels of cooperation and competition. So, too, do construal processes: People can be primed to cooperate or defect. Studies of cultures in remote parts of the world reveal that cooperation is a human universal and that cultures characterized by economic interdependence show greater cooperation. The tit-for-tat strategy involves initial cooperation and then reciprocation of an adversary’s behavior, encouraging mutual cooperation.

Glossary

reciprocal altruism
: Helping others with the expectation that they will probably return the favor in the future.

prisoner’s dilemma
: A situation involving payoffs to two people who must decide whether to cooperate or defect. In the end, trust and cooperation lead to higher joint payoffs than mistrust and defection do.

reputation
: The collective beliefs, evaluations, and impressions people hold about an individual within a social network.

tit-for-tat strategy
: A strategy in the prisoner’s dilemma game in which the player’s first move is cooperative; thereafter, the player mimics the other person’s behavior, whether cooperative or competitive. This strategy fares well when used against other strategies.

Chapter Review

SUMMARY

Morality

- According to the *social intuitionist model of moral judgment*, gut feelings or intuitions about right and wrong guide moral reasoning, which leads to moral judgment.
- *Moral foundations theory* points to five bases of moral judgment: care/harm, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity. Freedom/liberty is also important in moral judgments and may be a sixth foundation.
- Empirical studies find that each of the moral foundations is associated with emotions that guide moral judgments. Experiences of disgust, for example, amplify judgments that impure acts are wrong.
- Political liberals have been found to privilege the moral foundations of care/harm and fairness/reciprocity, whereas political conservatives appear to have a broader moral framework that also values authority/respect, ingroup loyalty, and purity/sanctity.

Altruism

- People may help others on the basis of selfish motives, including reducing *personal distress* and gaining *social rewards*, such as praise, attention, or gratitude.
- A form of pure, undiluted altruism is based on *empathic concern*—that is, the feeling of concern for another

person after observing and being moved by that person’s needs.

- Empathic concern motivates people to *volunteer* or otherwise enhance the welfare of others.
- Altruistic behavior is influenced by features of the situation, such as who is present and what sort of need or suffering is observed.
- *Bystander intervention* depends on the number of people observing the person needing help. The presence of others can lead to *diffusion of responsibility*, in which nobody takes responsibility for helping the person in need.
- When people are unsure whether a situation is an emergency, they might do nothing for fear of embarrassment in case nothing is really wrong.
- Victim characteristics that influence the likelihood of being helped include whether the person is similar to potential helpers and whether the victim makes their distress known.
- People who live in rural settings are more likely to help others than people who live in urban settings are.
- People from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more empathic than people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are, and they are more likely to give resources to strangers and to help people in need.
- Exposure to religious concepts increases levels of altruism, perhaps through the effects of feeling watched.
- From the standpoint of evolution, people’s actions should serve to increase the likelihood of survival and reproduction. According to the *kin selection* hypothesis, people will help others to preserve the genes of close kin.

Cooperation

- In *reciprocal altruism*, people help others or grant favors in the belief that such behavior will be reciprocated cooperatively in the future.

- Cooperation is part of human evolutionary heritage, and it is evident in almost all societies.
- The *prisoner's dilemma* game, used to study cooperation, tempts participants to maximize their own outcomes at the expense of another person by defecting. This strategy backfires if the other person also defects. The optimal outcome is for both participants to settle for something less than the maximum by cooperating.
- Interacting with people repeatedly over time increases cooperation.
- People look for nonverbal cues that someone will cooperate; if they detect such cues, they will cooperate in turn.
- Knowing a person's *reputation* as cooperative or competitive influences levels of cooperation in profound ways.
- Gossip is a means of spreading information to other group members about an individual's reputation, and it can increase cooperation in groups.
- Cooperation is widespread in certain cultures, particularly those in which members are dependent on one another.
- The *tit-for-tat strategy* in the prisoner's dilemma game is a reciprocal strategy that is cooperative, nonenvious, nonexploitable, forgiving, and easy to read. It helps maximize outcomes in potentially competitive situations that occur in real life.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Someone might argue that as long as you're helping, your motives don't matter. Do you agree? Why or why not? In what situations might motives matter most?
2. If you were working as a canvasser collecting signatures for a petition to ban the clear-cutting of an old-growth

forest that is home to many rare species, what strategies could you use to increase your signature count given what you know about moral foundations theory and the effects of disgust on moral judgment?

3. Based on what you've learned about bystander intervention and diffusion of responsibility, what actions could you take to increase the likelihood that someone would help you in an emergency that happens in front of a large crowd?
4. Research indicates that people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be more empathic and giving than people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. What factors might explain this difference? How might they relate to what you learned about power and prosocial behavior in Chapter 12?
5. According to evolutionary theory, behaviors that optimize survival and reproduction are favored by natural selection and are therefore more likely to persist. How, then, can we explain the evolution of altruism, which is by definition costly to the self?
6. After learning about research on gossip, have your feelings about this behavior changed? Under what circumstances might gossip serve a useful purpose?
7. In what ways could the tit-for-tat strategy be relevant in your life, such as in a romantic relationship?

The answer guidelines for the Think About It questions can be found at the back of the book . . .

ONLINE STUDY MATERIALS

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APPLICATION MODULE 1

Social Psychology and Health

OUTLINE

- Evolution and Health: Short-Term and Chronic Stress
- Culture and Health: Class, Stress, and Health Outcomes

- Situational Factors and Health: Benefits of Social Connection
- Construal and Health: Benefits of Perceived Control and Optimism

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MARIE ANTOINETTE, THE NOTORIOUS QUEEN of France during the late eighteenth century, was fond of gambling, fine clothes, behind-the-scenes political maneuvers, and extramarital affairs. She was a target of the revolutionaries when they overthrew the monarchy during the French Revolution, which began in 1789. Legend has it that after her capture, during the night before her execution by guillotine, Marie Antoinette’s hair turned white.

We know it’s physiologically impossible for hair to turn white during the course of a day. But excessive levels of stress—in Marie Antoinette’s case, her husband’s execution, the political upheaval she helped bring about, and her imminent demise in Paris at the guillotine—can damage the body. The stress response evolved to help us handle immediate pressures in the short run, but chronic and continuous stress can lead to all manner of health problems. For example, physicians now estimate that 1–2 percent of people who experience the symptoms of a heart attack actually have a condition known as apical ballooning syndrome (ABS). ABS arises when stress hormones, such as epinephrine, flood the left ventricle of the heart and cause it to swell to dangerous levels. ABS is often triggered by excessive emotional stress—the death of a child, the loss of a spouse, or exposure to warfare and extreme violence. In 1 percent of cases, ABS can be fatal.

Stress is just one of many emotional and social factors that can affect overall health. Structural conditions of one’s culture, such as rates of poverty and degrees of economic inequality, also influence health and well-being, with the result that people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds suffer disproportionately from almost every kind of health problem. Social situations, particularly the richness of social connections, can benefit health. Even certain construal processes—perceptions of control and optimism—can contribute to healthier lives. ■

Evolution and Health: Short-Term and Chronic Stress

Psychological stress results from appraisals that the challenges and demands we face surpass our current capacities, resources, and energies (Epel et al., 2018; Lazarus, 1966; Sapolsky, 1994). The challenges of daily life often exceed our capacity to meet them, and stress can arise in almost any situation: pressures at work, the loss of a loved one, economic hardship, conflicts with family members, trying times in a friendship or romantic relationship. Even positive events can be surprisingly stressful, such as graduation, a new job, planning a wedding, the early stages of marriage. And young children, while introducing incomparable joys for new parents, create new demands and unexpected sources of stress. In any of these circumstances, we may feel we don’t have the resources, support, energy, or skill to handle the challenges effectively; as a result, we experience psychological stress.

An important review of more than 200 studies in the stress literature has revealed that not all challenges elevate stress in ways that are potentially harmful for our health. Challenges that threaten our social identity and our connection to others are particularly likely to elevate our stress levels (Dickerson & Kemeny, 2004). If you don’t do well on an exam on a topic that you don’t care much about, for example, it won’t be as stressful as a poor performance in a class that matters to your sense of social identity.

The process by which psychological stress can undermine physical health begins in a system of the body known as the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and with the stress hormone cortisol (**Figure A1.1**). Stressful events activate the amygdala, a region of the brain that processes information related to threats. The amygdala stimulates the hypothalamus, which sends chemical messages to the pituitary gland to produce adrenocorticotropic hormone (ACTH). ACTH stimulates the adrenal glands (near the kidneys) to release cortisol into the bloodstream.

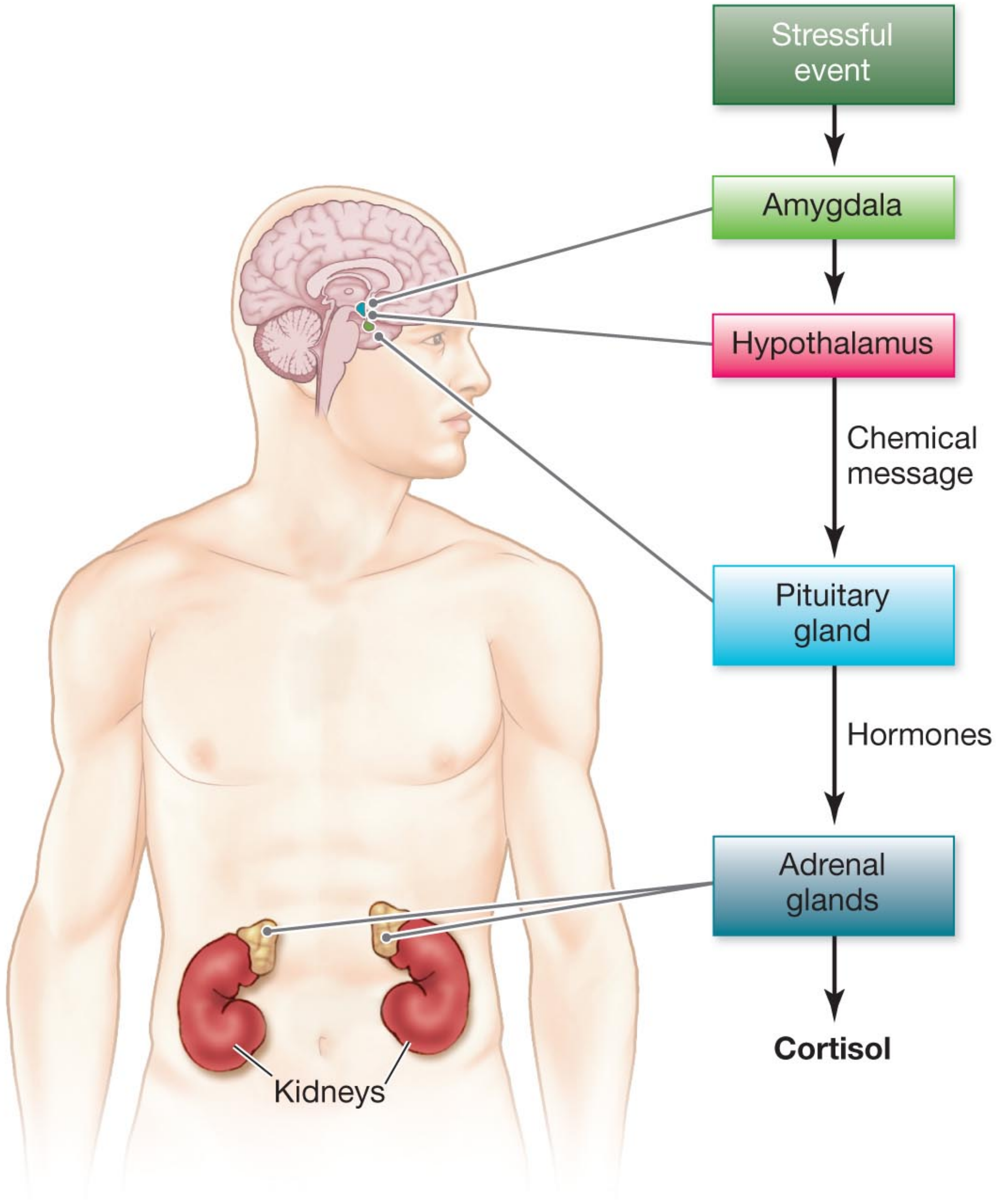

Stressful event
Amygdala
Hypothalamus
Chemical message
Pituitary gland
Hormones
Adrenal glands
Cortisol
Kidneys

FIGURE A1.1 **THE HPA AXIS AND THE RELEASE OF CORTISOL**

Cortisol has many effects on the body that prepare it to either fight or flee. Most notably, cortisol increases heart rate and blood pressure in order to distribute blood to appropriate muscle groups involved in the fight-or-flight response to stress. The hands sweat—a response that some think evolved to facilitate grasping, which can be useful during escape or fighting. Cortisol suppresses the activity of the immune system, thus keeping resources available for metabolically demanding fight-or-flight behavior. It is also involved in forming flashbulb, stress-related memories in the hippocampus, thereby aiding the recall of sources of danger in the environment.

Activation of the HPA axis and the accompanying release of cortisol into the bloodstream help us respond to short-term stress—immediate threats to survival. During early evolution, this stress response enabled our ancestors to detect an approaching predator or enraged rival and respond quickly with appropriate action. Today, this same stress response helps us power through course materials to study for an exam, avoid danger, or stay up until the wee hours of the morning taking care of a sick friend or child. Not surprisingly, researchers have observed elevated levels of cortisol in race car drivers, parachute jumpers, and students taking exams (Coriell & Adler, 2001).

The body’ s normal response to short-term stress is not usually a problem for most of us. Trouble begins when we experience chronic stress—that is, the persistent sense that we don’ t have the resources and skills to meet the challenges we are facing. One source of chronic stress is the structural conditions of your life: Do you have enough money, access to health care, quality education, and, if you’ re a parent, available childcare for your kids when you go to work? Greg Miller, Edith Chen, and Karen Parker (2011) have made the persuasive case that if you grow up in poverty, as one in six children in the United States do, the structural conditions of your life make it more likely that you will experience chronic stress and show elevated levels of cortisol. Children who grow up in poverty go to schools that are less well funded; live in neighborhoods with fewer parks, libraries, and after-school programs; and often live in "food deserts" where access to food may be unreliable—all structural features of their lives that make life more stressful and chronic stress more likely.

Chronic stress is also frequently the result of rumination, the tendency to think about some stressful event over and over again (Lyubomirsky et al., 2015; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987; J. M. Smith & Alloy, 2009). When we ruminate, we focus on a specific event. By thinking about all of its causes and ramifications, we turn it into a continuous focus of our thinking and a source of stress that affects all facets of our life. Suppose your boss offers a blunt criticism about how to sharpen up a proposal you've been working on. If you were to ruminate about this criticism, you'd elaborate on how it reflects more general problems you have at work, how you're never living up to expectations, how you'll let your parents down yet again. You would return to the critical comment in your mind throughout the day, making a state of chronic stress more likely by maintaining the constant sense that you don't have the skills or talents to meet others' expectations.

BOX A1.1

FOCUS ON DAILY LIFE

How to Stop Ruminating

One thing you’re probably ruminating about right now is how to stop ruminating and avoid the damaging effects of chronic stress. Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, the leading scholar in the study of rumination, and other scholars have offered several tips for reducing the tendency to ruminate (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003). Here are a few. First, simply name the stress. Matthew Lieberman and his colleagues call this affect labeling—providing words for the sources of stress around you (Lieberman et al., 2007; Torre & Lieberman, 2018). If you are worried about your exams, simply say to yourself, “Right now I’m anxious about exams.” If you are harassed by a bully at work, simply say, “That guy’s a real bully.” Lieberman and his colleagues have found that simply naming sources of stress quiets stress-related physiology in the brain and body.

Second, break loose from your pattern of rumination by turning your attention away from those recurring thoughts. Nolen-Hoeksema has documented how engaging in distracting activities during stressful periods—doing a crossword puzzle, working on a music playlist to share with a friend, or going for a walk—quiets the ruminative mind and calms you during these times.

A third tip is the “stop strategy.” Nolen-Hoeksema recommends that you simply say “Stop” to yourself, even shout it, when you find yourself ruminating. Shift your attention to other matters in your life rather than the negative thing you’re dwelling on—preparing for a summer camping trip with friends, for instance, or contacting a beloved family member you want to catch up with.

Finally, Nolen-Hoeksema recommends that if you’re a dyed-in-the-wool ruminator, simply set aside 30 minutes of ruminating time each day, ideally when you're feeling relatively calm. Knowing you've reserved that time will reduce your tendency to be overcome unexpectedly by rumination at random times throughout the day.

James Pennebaker adds an important twist to this last recommendation: He suggests that you take a bit of time to write about what is stressful in your life, perhaps in a journal (or song or poem if you are so inclined). In his research testing the benefits of what he calls expressive writing, people are asked to write about what they are most worried or upset about, focusing on the most complex and intense emotions associated with current struggles. Through this act of narrating difficult times in life, people gain insight into the sources of stress and, as a result, show less stress, anxiety, and depression and better physical health profiles (Pennebaker, 2018).

Studies have shown that people who ruminate about negative events experience prolonged stress compared with people who distract themselves from these events (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995; Morrow & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1990; Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008). Through rumination, specific stresses become chronic ones: Difficulty finding the right job after graduation feels like the beginning of a lifelong failure at finding good work; a romantic spat begins to feel like the fast road to a breakup; a transient health problem feels like a verdict of deteriorating health.

Moreover, chronic stress can be harmful to your body. As we have learned, chronic stress puts the body in a constant state of readiness for fight or flight, making it work harder: the heart beats faster, blood pressure is higher, veins are overworked, digestive processes are disrupted, and the immune system is inhibited (Sapolsky, 1994). Studies have found that because chronic stress is so taxing on the body, it can lead to ulcers, heart disease, cancer, and even cell death in the hippocampus and consequent memory loss. Feeling chronically stressed makes people more vulnerable to the common cold (S. Cohen et al., 2008). Chronic stress can even prematurely age one’s cells. Elissa Epel and her colleagues found that people experiencing chronic stress showed unusually short telomeres, sections of DNA at the ends of one’s chromosomes that normally shorten as part of the aging process (Epel et al., 2004; Lin & Epel, 2022). Across dozens of studies, the telomeres of the most stressed people had prematurely aged, sometimes by as much as ten years.

The message from the literature on stress and cortisol couldn’t be clearer. Evolution has equipped us with an immediate stress response, associated with elevated HPA axis activation and cortisol release, that enables us to respond to pressing problems. However, short-term stresses can sometimes become chronic, triggering excessively high levels of cortisol that damage our health. The structural conditions of our lives, our sense of lacking resources to adapt to life’s challenges, and rumination over stressful or negative events can have precisely that effect.

Glossary

psychological stress
: The sense that challenges and demands surpass one’s current capacities, resources, and energies.

rumination
: The tendency to think about a stressful event and its causes, symptoms, and implications repeatedly and continually over time.

expressive writing

Writing about the focal emotions of current stresses and trauma in ways that bring about insight and reduced stress.

Culture and Health: Class, Stress, and Health Outcomes

In a celebrated but apocryphal exchange, F. Scott Fitzgerald told Ernest Hemingway, “The rich are different from you and me.” Hemingway replied, “Yes, they have more money.” Hemingway could have added that the rich also lead healthier and longer lives.

Social psychologists think of wealth in terms of class or socioeconomic status (SES). SES is often determined in terms of three variables: family wealth and income, educational achievement (and that of one’s parents), and the prestige of work or career (and that of one’s parents; Kraus et al., 2012; J. M. Oakes & Rossi, 2003; Snibbe & Markus, 2005).

As you’ve learned throughout this book, social class is an important cultural dimension of one’s identity. People of various socioeconomic backgrounds tend to prefer different kinds of music (Snibbe & Markus, 2005), tend to explain economic and political events in different ways (see Chapter 5), and appear to be prone to different levels of altruism (see Chapter 14).

What does social class have to do with physical health? A great deal, it turns out. Dozens of studies have explored the association between social class and indicators of physical health. Just about every health problem is more prevalent among lower-SES people—those of lesser means (Adler et al., 1994; Coriell & Adler, 2001; Kraus, Park, & Tan, 2017). Lower-SES newborns are more likely to have a low birth weight, which is a major predictor of later health problems. Lower-SES children are more inclined to develop asthma, diabetes, and obesity, other early predictors of health problems later in life. In adulthood, lower-SES people are more likely to suffer from high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, respiratory illness, and poor metabolic functioning related to blood sugar levels. They are also more likely to experience poor health subjectively, with symptoms ranging from stomach upsets to headaches and bad backs (Adler et al., 1994; Gallo et al., 2005; Lehman et al., 2005; Singh-Manoux, Adler, & Marmot, 2003).

Class, Neighborhood, and Stress

How would you explain these class-based health differences? Your first inclination might be to take a situationist view and think about how the physical environments of people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds might contribute to health-damaging chronic stress. It’s clear that people from lower-SES and upper-SES backgrounds inhabit very different social and physical environments (see Coriell & Adler, 2001; Kraus et al., 2017), and a person’s daily environment and life circumstances matter. For instance, if you live close to someone, you’re more likely to become friends (see Chapter 9). Generous acts are more common in rural settings than in urban settings (see Chapter 14).

People living in poorer neighborhoods are more often exposed to air and water pollution, pesticides, and hazardous wastes. Toxins like these harm the nervous system directly, and they can also boost levels of stress. Lower-SES neighborhoods have fewer recreational spaces and parks, so residents have fewer opportunities to exercise, to be outdoors, to relax, or to calm down. It is well known that physical exercise reduces stress and increases general health (Lyubomirsky, 2007). Poorer neighborhoods also have a higher incidence of violent crime, and residents experience more pervasive feelings of threat (Macintyre, Maciver, & Solomon, 1993). And lower-SES neighborhoods tend to have few grocery stores and health care centers that would support a healthier lifestyle.

(A)

(B)

THE INFLUENCE OF NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY ON STRESS Neighborhood green spaces and play structures allow for stress-reducing play and relaxation. (A) Lower-SES neighborhoods have fewer such spaces than (B) higher-SES neighborhoods do.

Class, Rank, and Health

Another explanation for the connection between social class and health has to do with rank, or power (Adler et al., 1994; Keltner, 2016). Lower-SES individuals have fewer resources and limited access to opportunities, and these play an important role in defining a person’ s rank in society. Researchers have learned that in human and nonhuman groups alike, having subordinate status can lead to chronic feelings of threat and stress, accompanied by activation of the HPA axis and elevated cortisol. Robert Sapolsky (1982, 1994) has found, for instance, that subordinate baboons have chronically higher cortisol levels as well as a variety of health problems, including an increased risk of cardiovascular disease and lower reproductive success.

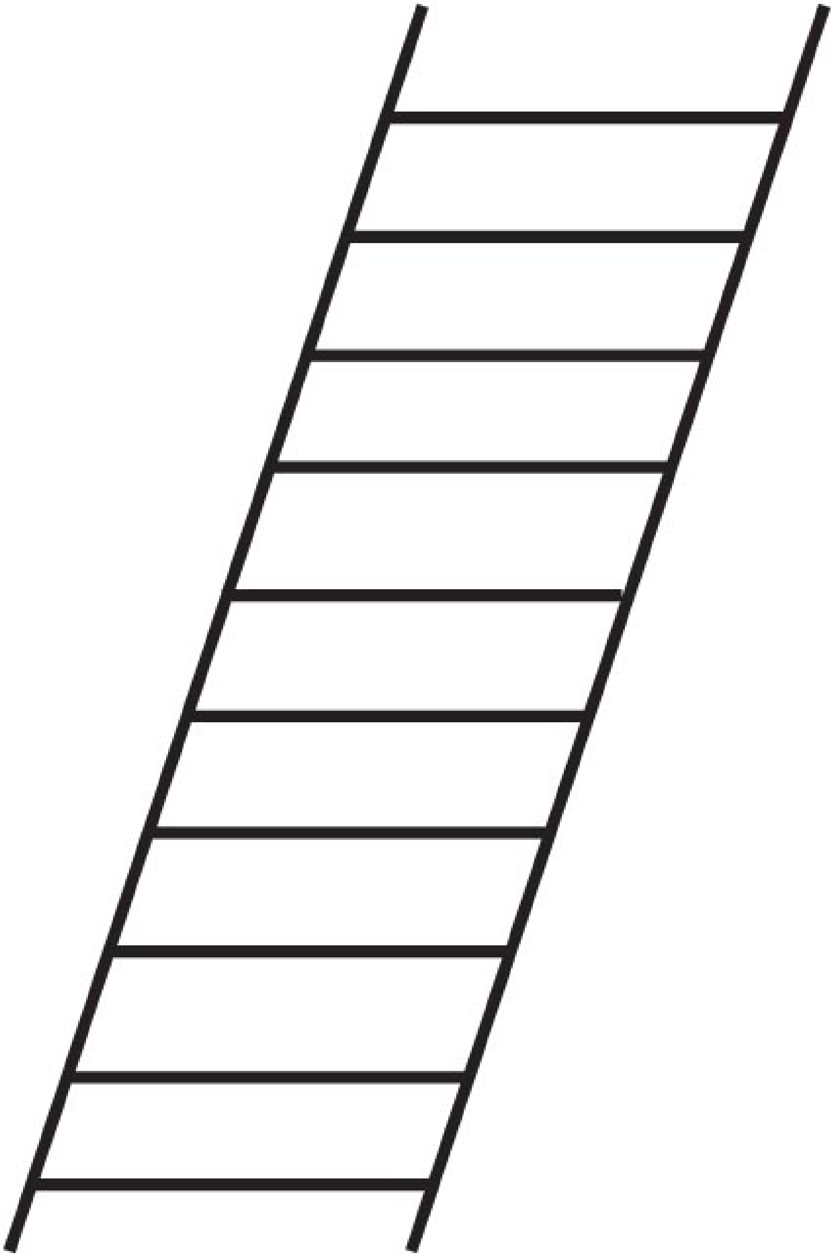


FIGURE A1.2 THE LADDER MEASURE Place a large X on the rung that best represents your socioeconomic rank.

Social class may influence physical health through perceptions of rank or relative status. Lower-SES people may construe their lives in terms of occupying positions of subordinate status, and this construal may damage their health. To capture this idea, researchers have begun to measure construals of rank with what is known as the ladder measure. Take a look at **Figure A1.2**. Think of the ladder as representing the social class of people in the United States. At the top are those who have the most money, the most education, and the most respected jobs. At the bottom are those who have the least money, the least education, and the least respected jobs (or no jobs). The higher up you are on this ladder, the closer you are to the people at the very top. The lower you are, the closer you are to the people at the very bottom. Where would you place yourself on this ladder?

What’s interesting about this measure is that it’s based on subjective construal. A fairly wealthy person living among Fortune 500 CEOs, for example, could self-report a lower rank on this scale—and that self construal would be associated, studies find, with important health outcomes. With each jump up the ladder of the class hierarchy, people are likely to enjoy better health. In a study of employees of the British Civil Service, those in the lowest-ranked positions (such as janitors) were 3 times more likely to die over a ten-year period than the highest-ranked administrators were (Marmot, Shipley, & Rose, 1984).

Nancy Adler and her colleagues (1994) have found that with each move up the class hierarchy, people are less likely than those just below them to die in infancy. They are also less vulnerable to coronary heart disease, lung cancer, bronchitis, respiratory disease, asthma, arthritis, cervical cancer, and neurological disorders (Adler et al., 1994). The experience of subordinate rank, even for people who have a good deal in life (those in the middle or upper middle classes), can lead to chronic activation of the HPA axis and the associated health problems. Conversely, the feeling of being empowered benefits one’ s sense of agency and self-esteem and therefore general health.

Situational Factors and Health: Benefits of Social Connection

We are a species that has evolved to connect with other people and to enjoy many kinds of relationships. And when we connect, we are healthier. On this point, it’s worth recalling a review of studies you learned about earlier: In a survey of more than 340,000 people, those individuals who felt they had strong social relationships (and experienced little loneliness, which is prevalent today) enjoyed an average of ten years of extra life expectancy (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010). Being connected to others in meaningful relationships is not only fun, gratifying, and good for our well-being; it is also good for our physical health.

One important reason is that strong relationships provide support, which is beneficial for reducing stress and, therefore, improving our health. To explicitly examine the relationship between social connection and health, researchers have measured strength of social support using scales like the one in **Table A1.1**. This scale captures the extent to which we can count on friends and family for support and care. With measures like these, researchers have documented that social connections are vital to our physical, mental, and emotional health.

Consider some specific findings. In one study, people who reported having fewer meaningful connections to others at the start of the study were 1.9 to 3.1 times more likely to have died nine years later (Berkman & Syme, 1979). People who report having strong ties to others live longer (Berkman, 1995; Coriell & Adler, 2001). Janice Kiecolt-Glaser and her colleagues have found that people who report being lonely show higher levels of cortisol, suggesting that strong social connections might calm HPA axis activation (Kiecolt-Glaser & Glaser, 1995).

These correlational studies raise questions about causation. Do strong relationships promote physical health? Or are physically healthy people more likely to enter into psychologically healthy relationships? Both causal relationships are plausible.

TABLE A1.1 A SOCIAL SUPPORT SCALE

1. There is a special person who is around when I am in need.

2. There is a special person with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.

3. My family really tries to help me.

4. I get the emotional help and support I need from my family.

5. I have a special person who is a real source of comfort for me.

6. My friends really try to help me.

7. I can count on my friends when things go wrong.

8. I can talk about my problems with my family.

9. I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.

10. There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings.

11. My family is willing to help me make decisions.

12. I can talk about my problems with my friends.

Source: Adapted from Zimet et al., 1988.

Experimental results indicate that physiological stress is calmed by being with supportive other people. In one study, for example, women performed stressful, challenging tasks either in the presence of a friend or alone. Those accompanied by a friend showed a milder stress-related cardiovascular response to the challenging tasks (Kamarck, Manuch, & Jennings, 1990). In another study, people were required to give a public speech with very little time to prepare, which no doubt rattled their nerves and elevated their cortisol. Those who had a supportive person in the audience, compared with those who did not, had lower blood pressure during the course of the speech (S. J. Lepore, Allen, & Evans, 1993). In still other work, participants gave a presentation about why each of them would be a good candidate for an administrative job on campus while two audience members looked on, expressionless, offering few signs of enthusiasm and a great deal of skepticism (S. E. Taylor et al., 2008). Before and after the speech, participants' cortisol levels were measured. Those who reported having strong connections with others, a sense of autonomy, and healthy self-esteem showed less intense cortisol responses to the stressful speech.

Perhaps the most dramatic evidence of the health benefits of social connection comes from an influential study by David Spiegel and his colleagues (1989). Spiegel was interested in whether a sense of social connection would lead to more favorable outcomes during treatment for breast cancer. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In one condition, they engaged in weekly sessions of emotionally supportive group therapy with other breast cancer patients; in a second condition, participants were assigned to a nonintervention control group. As you can see in **Figure A1.3**, those in the group therapy condition survived 18 months longer (37 months) than women in the nonintervention control group did (19 months).

These results support the thesis that social connection leads to positive responses to stress and better health overall. To integrate these findings, Shelley Taylor and her colleagues (2000) have offered an influential account of the benefits of a “tend-and-befriend” approach to stress, which we considered in Chapter 6. Taylor argues that paying attention to the needs of others engages physiological processes in our own body that reduce stress-related HPA axis activation, thus paving the way for better health. A central player in this tend-and-befriend branch of the nervous system is the chemical oxytocin. Oxytocin floats through the brain and bloodstream and fosters feelings of trust, love, and devotion (see Chapter 6). In nonhuman species from rats to primates oxytocin increases attachment-related behavior and reduces cortisol levels. When we give, care, and connect, Taylor reasons, we activate oxytocin and this attachment system, thereby moderating our own stress. One of the most important keys to a healthy life, then, is to stay connected.

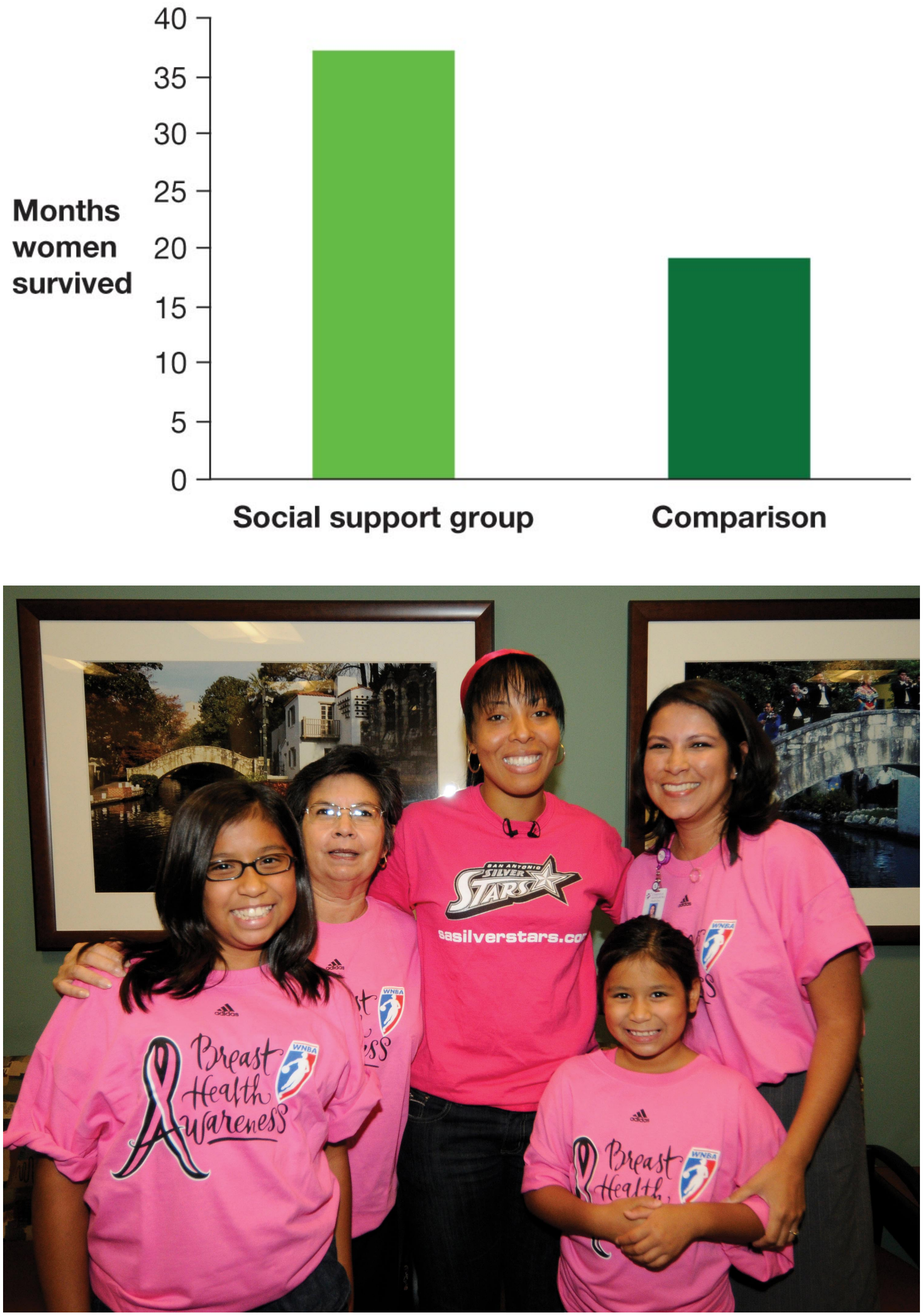


FIGURE A1.3**HEALTH BENEFITS OF SOCIAL CONNECTION**This study demonstrated that breast cancer survivors live longer when they have social support. Source: Adapted from Spiegel et al., 1989.

Construal and Health: Benefits of Perceived Control and Optimism

In the early 1980s, Shelley Taylor began a series of studies of how people live with serious disease (see, for example, S. E. Taylor, 1983). In one study, she interviewed women who were being treated for breast cancer. One out of eight women in the United States and Canada will suffer from breast cancer at some time in their lives. While the survival rates are improving every year, the psychological ramifications are complex. Upon being diagnosed, women often feel anxiety, fear, shame, and even hostility—just the kinds of emotions that trigger HPA axis activation and cortisol release, thereby causing stress and perhaps worsening the effects of the disease.

In studying the interviews, Taylor found that women with a breast cancer diagnosis did not necessarily accept their condition passively. Instead, they actively constructed narratives about this new dimension of their identity. Many of them found reasons to be grateful in surprising kinds of social comparisons. Women who were diagnosed later in life felt grateful it hadn’t happened to them as young women, while they were raising children or starting a career; they appreciated having had the chance to live a full life without cancer. Younger women, by contrast, were grateful they weren’t older when they got their diagnosis, for they felt they had the physical robustness to respond strongly to the disease.

One construal process that seems to benefit a person’s overall health is developing a sense of control—a feeling of mastery, autonomy, and efficacy related to influencing important life outcomes (Hong et al., 2021; Shapiro, Schwartz, & Astin, 1996). Numerous studies have found that for people of any age, a sense of agency and control benefits the body. In Taylor’s study of breast cancer patients, perceived control proved to be a source of good health. Taylor found that more than two-thirds of the women reported a sense of control over their situation. They assumed that through diet, exercise, and positive beliefs, they could influence the course of their disease. (People suffering from other conditions, such as HIV/AIDS and coronary problems, have similar feelings.) And the more the patient reported perceived control, the better she responded to the disease as assessed by her physician (S. E. Taylor, Lichtman, & Wood, 1984; S. E. Taylor, Wood, & Lichtman, 1983).

In general, people with a more pronounced sense of control enjoy better health and well-being (S. Cohen & Herbert, 1996; Hong et al., 2021). Diseases and other health problems threaten our basic beliefs about the control we have over our body and our life, and a sense of losing that control is stressful in its own right. Thus, a good dose of perceived control can counter that stress and promote better health.

BOX A1.2

FOCUS ON POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Tips for Reducing Stress

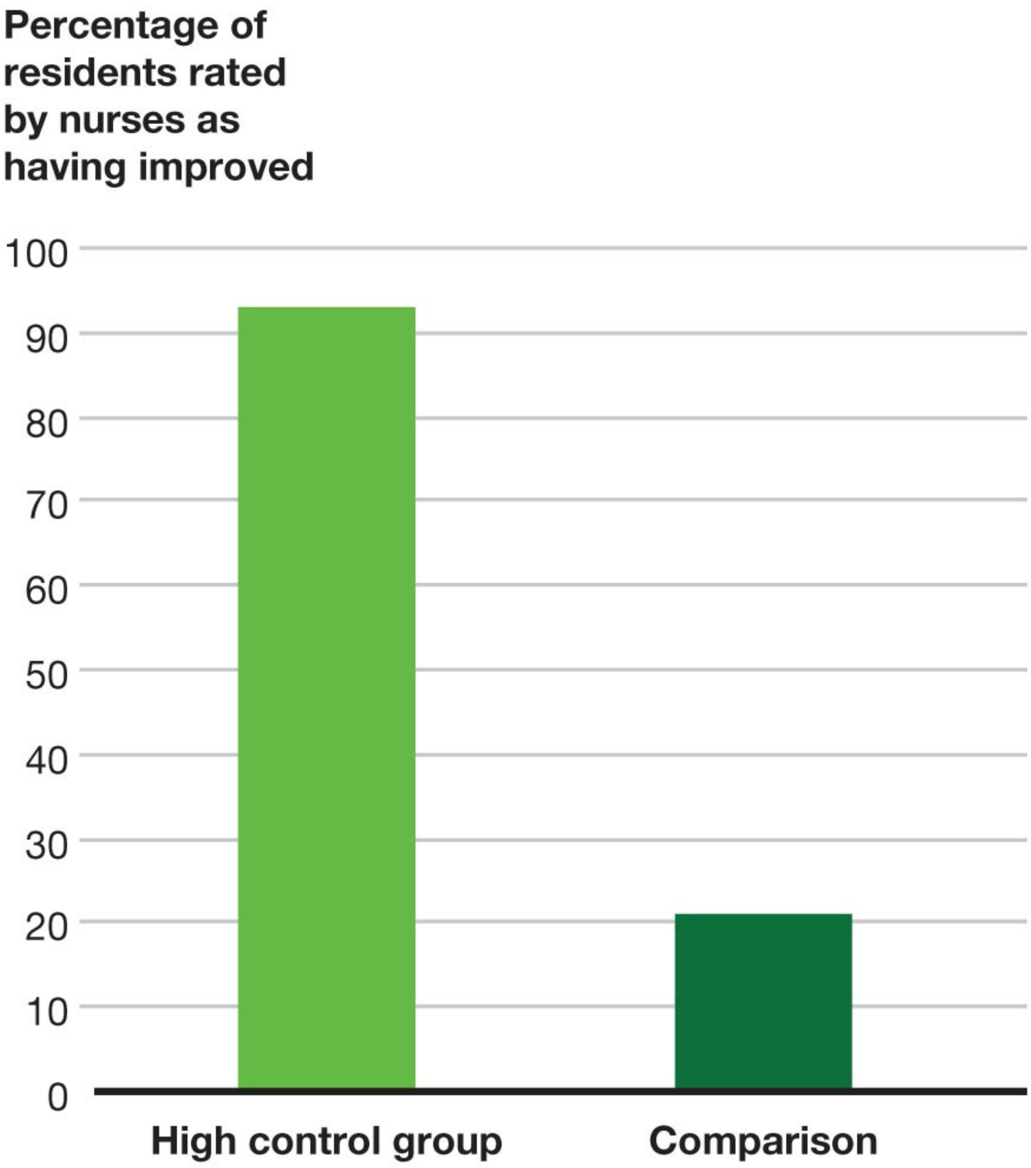
Given the problematic effects of chronic stress on health, social psychologists have concerned themselves with what we can do to reduce stress (e.g., Lyubomirsky, 2007; Pressman, Jenkins, & Moskowitz, 2019). In many ways, you will be well served by cultivating some of the practices we considered in Chapter 5, such as spending more time with friends, expressing appreciation, taking a moment to reflect on what you are grateful for, and getting outdoors to experience some awe. These practices not only elevate well-being but also reduce stress and are good for physical health (e.g., Monroy & Keltner, 2022; Pressman et al., 2019). Here are a few other tips for reducing stress (Lyubomirsky, 2007). None of them cost much or harm the environment, and all of them yield great health benefits.

1. *Focus on an adaptive coping approach*. Devise specific strategies for responding to your sources of stress, one step at a time, with concrete actions. If you're stressed about getting into graduate school, write down the specific actions you need to take to get ready to apply—volunteering in a lab, doing extracurricular activities, forming relationships with different professors, preparing for the GREs.
2. *Exercise* (*the more*, *the better*). You can get a runner's high not only from jogging but from many kinds of exercise—dance, pickup basketball, hiking in the mountains, a lunchtime walk with a friend, cross-country skiing. Almost any kind of exercise tends to lower stress levels.
3. *Sleep (a bit more)*. Many people in our modern culture simply don't sleep enough. Matthew Walker (2017) has made a convincing research-based case that sleeping a bit more is good for physical and mental health. To improve your sleep, you might try one or more of the following: Stop your consumption of digital content at a reasonable hour of the night, keep screens away from where you sleep, avoid eating late at night, and practice the tips offered in this module for reducing rumination and stress.

4. *Seek out positive emotions*. Several studies have suggested that the more you experience positive emotions, the less stress you’ll have. People who experience positive emotions such as gratitude, love, amusement, contentment, and awe have lower mortality rates (J. T. Moskowitz, Epel, & Acree, 2008; Pressman et al., 2019). When feeling stressed, take a moment to write down something you’re grateful for. If someone has done something to harm you, try to forgive. Stream some comedy videos and samples of music that make you feel peaceful. Or just take a break and have an outing with friends. All these experiences bring different kinds of positive emotion, which will reduce your stress.
5. *Meditate*. There are many kinds of meditation: focusing on the breath, focusing on different sensations in the body, practicing a kind approach to other people, and being mindful, or aware, of ordinary everyday actions, such as eating and walking. An expanding body of scientific literature shows that meditation reduces levels of cortisol and stress.

These findings raise an intriguing possibility: Might introducing a sense of control into the lives of people with declining health improve their well-being? That question motivated a striking study by Ellen Langer and Judith Rodin (1976) of nursing home residents. As people age into their later years, they often experience a pronounced loss of control in many realms: The loss of eyesight, muscular coordination, and strength makes simple physical tasks more challenging; the loss of memory can make social interactions difficult. These age-related losses are amplified, many believe, by facilities where older people forfeit even more control—over their schedules, their meals, and their social activities.

Langer and Rodin (1976) did something ingenious. They decided to explore the effects of increasing the sense of control among residents of a particular nursing home. The participants were all healthy, ambulatory residents, ages 65–90. On one floor, individuals were brought together and led in a discussion by a staff member about personal responsibility and the various ways they had personal control in their residence, ranging from planning their free time to voicing complaints to the staff. Each participant then received a small plant and was asked to take care of it. In a second condition, on a neighboring floor, participants were told about all the things in the nursing home available to them, with no mention of their personal control. They too received plants but were told that the staff would water and care for them.


Percentage of residents rated by nurses as having improved
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
High control group
Comparison

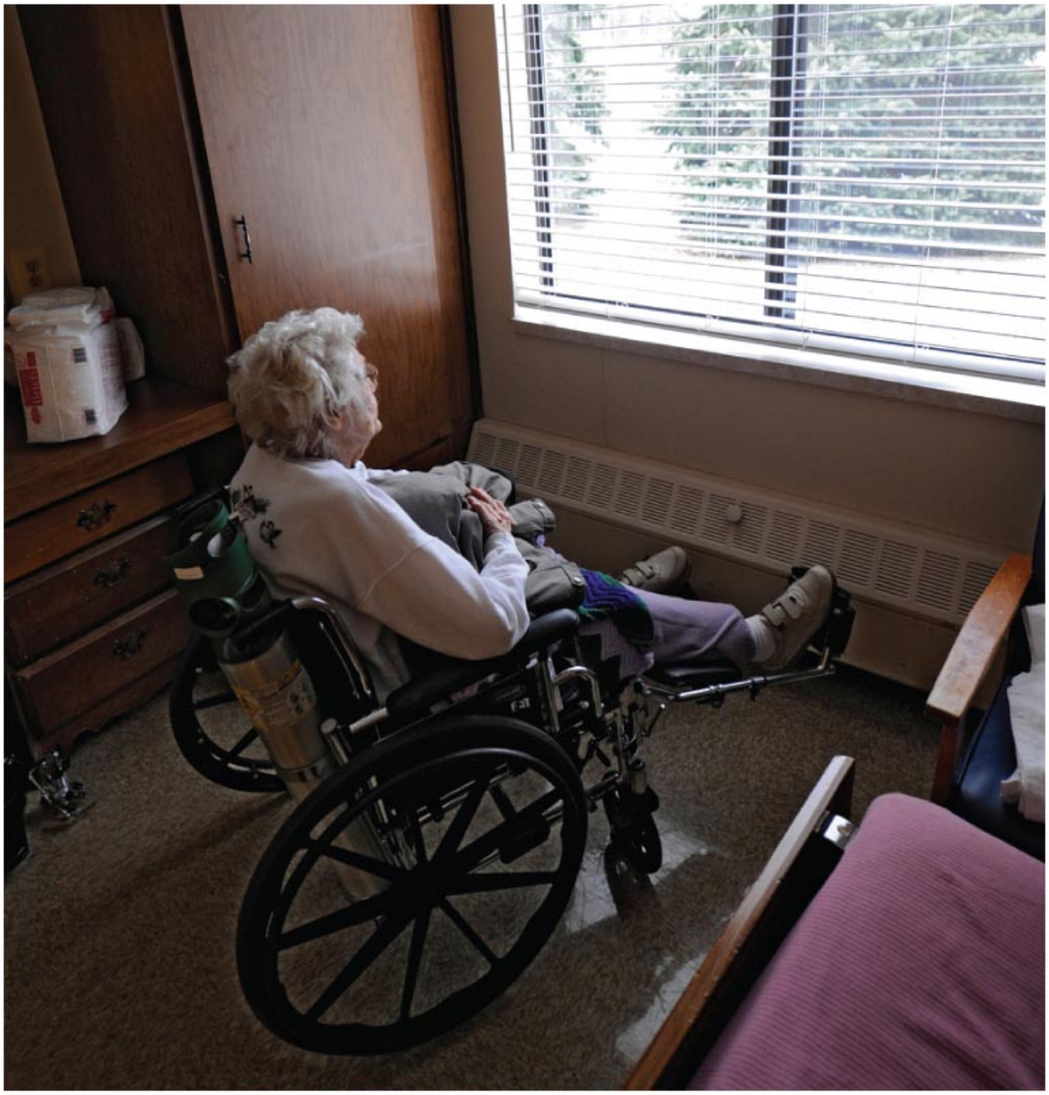


FIGURE A1.4**PERSONAL CONTROL AND HAPPINESS**The elderly woman in the photo appears to be experiencing little control in her nursing home.Source: Adapted from Langer & Rodin, 1976.

Before these discussions and again three weeks later, the researchers gathered several measures of how well the elderly residents were faring (**Figure A1.4**). Sure enough, participants on the floor that emphasized personal control showed greater increases in happiness compared with those on the neighboring floor. They were more inclined to attend a free movie. They were 10 times as likely to participate in a game proposed by the staff. And as rated by the nurses, nearly 4 times as many of the participants with the uplifted sense of control were judged to have improved in their overall functioning. Having a sense of personal control appears to quiet the emotions that activate the HPA axis.

A second construal that is quite important for health is optimism (see Chapter 5). Highly optimistic people have positive expectations about the future. They are likely to endorse the statement “In uncertain times, I usually expect the best” and to disagree with the statement “If something can go wrong for me, it will.” Studies have shown that people who are more optimistic tend to have greater happiness and well-being—and they enjoy better health as well. For example, in early research on optimism and health, Charles Carver and Michael Scheier (1982) found that individuals who reported higher levels of optimism responded with greater robustness to coronary artery bypass surgery and breast cancer and recovered more quickly. Researchers have found that self-reports of pessimism predict a more rapid weakening of the immune system (O’Donovan et al., 2009). In a study of men who graduated from college in 1945, those who reported higher levels of optimism at age 21 reported better physical health 35 years later (Peterson, Seligman, & Vaillant, 1988). More generally, a sense of optimism predicts better health in many different ways, from the reduced likelihood of cardiovascular disease to greater longevity (Conversano et al., 2010).

Taylor and her colleagues (1992) have argued that beliefs in perceived control and optimism benefit health in several ways. With an increased sense of control, people generally respond to stress more effectively. Moreover, people with a heightened sense of control and an optimistic outlook tend to engage in better health practices. In one study, optimistic HIV patients had healthier habits and involvements, including building strong networks of social support.

Module Review

SUMMARY

Evolution and Health: Short-Term and Chronic Stress

- *Psychological stress* is the sense that challenges and demands surpass one’s capacities, resources, and energies.
- The hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis produces the stress hormone cortisol, the continuous release of which results in chronic stress.
- *Rumination*, or repeatedly thinking about some stressful event, can be reduced by affect labeling and expressive writing.

Culture and Health: Class, Stress, and Health Outcomes

- People of lower socioeconomic status have poorer health than higher-SES individuals do, in part because they have more stress in daily life.
- The subjective construal of lower rank or status, such as being a subordinate executive, can cause stress-related illnesses.

Situational Factors and Health: Benefits of Social Connection

- People with more meaningful relationships and connections to others tend to be healthier.
- Being accompanied by a sympathetic person when undergoing a stressful experience significantly reduces the potentially damaging physiological and psychological effects of stress.

Construal and Health: Benefits of Perceived Control and Optimism

- Having a sense of perceived control over one’s circumstances reduces stress and yields health benefits.
- Having a sense of optimism, a belief that positive outcomes are likely in the future, is associated with better health.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. The experience of psychological stress typically triggers a host of physiological changes, including increased heart rate and blood pressure, sweating, and suppression of the immune system. When might these changes be helpful, and when are they more likely to be harmful?
2. Who is more likely to suffer from health problems, a janitor or a Fortune 500 CEO, and why? How might their subjective construals of their positions influence their health?
3. According to the tend-and-befriend theory, why might providing social support improve health?
4. Research indicates that optimistic people tend to enjoy better health. Can you conclude from these findings that becoming more optimistic will improve your health? Why or why not? If you were a researcher conducting a study on

this topic, what other factors might you want to control for?

The answer guidelines for the Think About It questions can be found at the back of the book . . .

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APPLICATION MODULE 2

Social Psychology and Education

OUTLINE

- Pygmalion in the Classroom
- Intelligence: Thing or Process?

- Culture and Achievement
- Blocking Stereotype Threat in the Classroom
- Social Fears and Academic Achievement
- Teaching With Entertainment-Education
- Statistics, Social Science Methodology, and Critical Thinking

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OVERHEARD IN PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA: One European American high school senior said to another, upon hearing of her friend’s super-high SAT scores, “Good grief, Jessica, those scores are positively Asian.”

On average, the academic achievements of Asian American students are undeniably impressive, and students in Asian countries regularly outperform Americans in math and science. Why do you suppose that is? What could be done to help European American and African American students perform at the level of Asian American students? Or do you think such a change in overall performance is highly unlikely or impossible?

Social psychologists have studied why some students perform better in school than others do. More important, they have investigated ways in which research findings might help improve educational outcomes—especially for students from historically marginalized groups, who often perform below their capacity.

Social psychology has also highlighted excellent tools for improving critical thinking skills, including certain kinds of educational experiences and other remarkably brief but effective interventions. ■

Pygmalion in the Classroom

How much influence does a teacher have on students' academic progress? The idea that one person can help transform another—even create an extraordinary person from ordinary raw material—has been a theme of literature going back to Greek mythology. In the foundational story, a sculptor named Pygmalion makes a statue so beautiful that he falls in love with it and, with the help of the goddess Venus, brings it to life. An updated version of the myth is the musical *My Fair Lady*, which is about an eccentric English phonetics professor who coaches a lowly flower girl in manners and accent to help her pass for a lady in British high society.

In 1968, social psychologists Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson published a study called *Pygmalion in the Classroom* that examined the effect of teachers' expectations on students' intellectual development and achievement. The study caused an uproar in the fields of both psychology and education. All students in a particular school took an IQ test. At the beginning of the school year, the researchers told the teachers that about 20 percent of their students were "late bloomers"—that is, that they were expected to show substantial IQ growth over the course of the year. As far as the teachers knew, the late bloomers were identified on the basis of the test, but in fact, they were designated by random assignment. The investigators reported that the designated late bloomers did indeed achieve substantial IQ gains after a brief period. The gains for young children were shockingly high—15 points for first-graders and 10 points for second-graders. These increases seemed to indicate that teachers' expectations for children created a powerful self-fulfilling prophecy: If the teacher believed the child was going to gain in intelligence, the teacher behaved toward the child in a way that such a gain was likely to occur (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

According to education critics, the results showed that teacher bias, presumably in favor of White, middle-class children, was a significant reason these children performed better in school and scored higher on IQ tests. Conversely, the scores of Black and Hispanic children, as well as the scores of children of lower socioeconomic status (SES), were being pulled down because of teachers' negative expectations for them.

The furor over the 1968 Rosenthal and Jacobson experiment persists to this day. Claims have ranged from outright accusations of fraud to allegations that the results underestimated what goes on in the classroom all the time. Lee Jussim and Kent Harber (2005) reviewed the almost 400 studies conducted in the first 35 years after the initial report and found several important patterns.

1. When expectations are manipulated, it's clear that teacher expectations sometimes do affect student IQ and academic performance. (If expectations aren't manipulated, a correlation between teacher expectation and student performance could be due simply to accurate assessments of aptitude on the teacher's part: Children who are believed to be—and are—more talented do better in school.)
2. The extremely large effects that Rosenthal and Jacobson found proved to be exceptional; subsequent investigators almost never documented effects as large. A gain of about 3 IQ points is typical.
3. Teacher expectation effects occur only if expectations are manipulated early in the school year, within the first two weeks.
4. Teacher expectation effects are greater for first-graders and second-graders than for older children.

5. Most important, teacher expectation effects can be genuinely large for low-achieving, lower-SES children and for Black children.

In light of these findings, a modified version of the original claims appears to be appropriate: A teacher’s belief that lower-achieving, lower-SES, and Black students can do well intellectually and academically can indeed enhance their performance.

Intelligence: Thing or Process?

Self-fulfilling prophecies can result not only from teachers' expectations but also from students' beliefs about their own intellectual abilities. Carol Dweck and her colleagues have shown that people can have very different views about the nature of intelligence (Dweck, 2007; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Some believe intelligence is a malleable quality that can be improved with effort; this is called an incremental theory of intelligence. Other people think that intelligence is a fixed, predetermined "thing" people have to one degree or another and that there isn't much they can do to change it; this is the entity theory of intelligence.

Incremental theorists believe they can increase their intellectual ability, and they attribute failure to a lack of effort or to the difficulty of the task (Henderson & Dweck, 1990). As a result, they work more toward goals that will increase their ability, even at the risk of exposing their ignorance, and less toward goals that would merely tend to document their ability. In contrast, entity theorists are less confident that what they do will make them any smarter. They blame their failures on a lack of intellectual ability, and they're inclined to feel they can do little to improve because they just don't have what it takes. Entity theorists tend to choose tasks that seem likely to indicate they have good intellectual ability but that provide no opportunity to learn something new. It should be clear which attitude tends to result in increased intellectual skills as well as improved self-esteem.

BOX A2.1

FOCUS ON TEACHING

How to Tutor: The Five Cs

Social psychologist Mark Lepper made an intriguing discovery while studying college student tutors of elementary school children who were having trouble in math. Some tutors had a big—and fast—impact on their pupils. Others had no effect. Lepper then went to work to determine the difference between the effective and the ineffective tutors. Which of the following behaviors do you think would be helpful, and which unhelpful?

1. When a student starts to make even a minor mistake, stop the student immediately to avoid reinforcing the incorrect behavior.
2. If the student makes a mistake, carefully state the rule the student needs to know to successfully solve the problem.
3. Keep the problems simple to avoid damaging self-esteem.
4. Praise the student often for doing good work.
5. Try to avoid getting emotionally involved with the student’s difficulties.

Actually, all these approaches are unhelpful and are shunned by effective tutors. These approaches conflict with one or more of the strategies that characterize successful tutors. Lepper and his colleagues identified Five Cs for effective tutoring (Lepper et al., 1993; Lepper & Woolverton, 2001):

1. *Control*. Foster a sense of control in the student, making the student feel in command of the material.
2. *Challenge*. Challenge the student—but at a level of difficulty that’s within the student’s range of capability.
3. *Confidence*. Instill confidence by maximizing the student’s success (assuring the student that the problem the student just solved was a difficult one) and by minimizing failure (providing excuses for mistakes and emphasizing the part of the problem the student got right).
4. *Curiosity*. Encourage curiosity through Socratic methods (asking leading questions) and by linking the problem to other problems the student has seen that appear on the surface to be different.
5. *Contextualize*. Place the problem in a real-world context or in a context from a movie or TV show.

Expert tutors have a number of strategies that set them apart. They don’t bother to correct minor errors like forgetting to write down a plus sign. If the student is about to make a mistake, they gently suggest a problem-solving path that would prevent it from occurring. Or sometimes they let the student make the mistake when they think it can provide a valuable learning experience. They never dumb down the material for the sake of self-esteem but instead change the way they present it. Most of what good tutors do is ask questions. They ask students to explain their reasoning. They ask leading questions. They’re actually less likely to give *positive* feedback than ineffective tutors are because, Lepper theorizes, doing so makes the tutoring session feel too evaluative. And finally, expert tutors are always nurturing and empathic.

Henderson and Dweck (1990) found that students entering junior high school who were incremental theorists ended up getting better grades than students who were entity theorists. Students who were about equal in their math performance at the beginning of junior high progressively increased their math grades over the course of two years if they were incremental theorists, but they tended not to improve their grades if they were entity theorists (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007).

But who is right—the entity theorist or the incremental theorist? Neither—or rather, both. On the one hand, if you’re an entity theorist, your intellectual skills probably won’t improve as much as they could. So you’re right: If you don’t believe your ability is under your control, it in fact doesn’t improve much, and your genes actually exert a greater influence on your ability than they would if you believed otherwise. On the other hand, if you’re an incremental theorist, you’re also right: You believe your ability is under your control and you act accordingly, thereby building on your genetic strengths and increasing your ability.

Glossary

incremental theory of intelligence	The belief that intelligence is something people can improve by working at it.
entity theory of intelligence	The belief that intelligence is something people are born with and can’t change.

Culture and Achievement

Why do Asian students—especially Chinese, Japanese, and Korean students and Asian American students—tend to perform above average on academic tasks? Are they intrinsically smarter than people of European heritage? Does something about their genes lead to intellectual superiority?

In fact, there is no good evidence that people of Asian heritage have a genetic advantage over Americans of Western origin (Flynn, 2007; Nisbett, 2009; D. Thomas, 2017). Cross-cultural comparisons of Asians and Westerners find no evidence that Asians have higher IQs, though admittedly it can be difficult to compare IQs across different cultures and languages (Flynn, 1991; Nisbett, 2009). A comparison of the IQs of children starting first grade in Minneapolis, Sendai (Japan), and Taipei (Taiwan) found that the American children had slightly higher IQs than either group of Asian children (Stevenson et al., 1990). Considering the socialization practices of Asians and Americans, this finding shouldn’t be surprising: Asians focus on social and emotional growth during the early years, and Americans, especially middle-class and upper-middle-class Americans, are more likely to focus on intellectual skills (Stevenson et al., 1990). By fifth grade, the IQ differences were gone, but the Asian children were far ahead of the Americans in math—partly a result of better math teaching and longer school years in the Asian countries (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992) but also a result of Asian children tending to work harder at math (Stevenson & Lee, 1996). Asian (and Asian American) students study many more hours a week on average than European Americans do, who in turn study many more hours than African American students.

> “If there is no dark and dogged will, there will be no shining accomplishment; if there is no dull and determined effort, there will be no brilliant achievement.”
>
> —CHINESE SAYING

The best evidence available on ability differences between Asian Americans and European Americans comes from a massive study of the high school seniors of the class of 1966 (Flynn, 1991). The IQs of the Asian Americans were trivially lower than those of the European Americans—not surprising given that many of them came from homes where English wasn’t the primary language. However, Asian Americans’ SAT scores were substantially higher. SAT scores, of course, are partly a reflection of the kinds of skills measured by IQ tests and partly a reflection of the work students have done. Even more striking, when the study participants were adults, fully 55 percent of the Chinese Americans, the largest group of the Asian Americans, ended up in professional, technical, or managerial positions (Flynn, 2007). Only a third of the European American participants ended up in those jobs. The Asian Americans capitalized on their ability to a far greater extent than did the European Americans.

BOX A2.2

FOCUS ON CULTURE

Confucius and Theories About Ability

Asian Americans with a “Confucian” culture heritage, such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean cultures, achieve at levels higher than their ability scores would predict. Such outcomes could be expected based on ancient theories about talent. The Chinese teacher and philosopher Confucius—the founding father of modern East Asian cultures—said that although some of our ability is a gift from heaven, most of it is due to hard work. For 2,000 years, it was possible for a young person to go from being a poor peasant to being the highest magistrate in China by dint of study and hard work. In no other country until modern times was there that degree of social mobility. It’s no surprise that East Asians, and Americans who spring from that region, are devout incremental theorists. They believe, much more than many European Americans do, that intellectual achievement is mostly a matter of hard work (C. Chen & Stevenson, 1995; I. Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999; Heine et al., 2001; Holloway, 1988; Stevenson et al., 1990). When Japanese and Canadians were told they had either succeeded or failed on a task that presumably measured creativity, the Canadians worked longer on a similar task if they had succeeded on the first one, thereby continuing to regard themselves as good at the task. The Japanese worked longer if they had failed, thus extending their abilities (Heine et al., 2001).

Confucius

Blocking Stereotype Threat in the Classroom

Other racial and ethnic groups, such as Black and Hispanic Americans, have lower average IQ and academic achievement scores than Asian Americans and European Americans. There are numerous social reasons for these differences. Most of these factors are in flux, however, and in recent years the IQ and achievement gaps have begun to lessen significantly (Nisbett, 2009; Turkheimer, Harden, & Nisbett, 2017a, 2017b).

To explore one of the factors suppressing academic success, Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson demonstrated that women and people of color may perform poorly on ability tests because of stereotype threat, or the fear of confirming stereotypes about their group (see Chapter 11). With Catherine Good and Michael Inzlicht, Aronson decided to see what would happen if low-SES students of color could be convinced that their abilities were under their control. The researchers performed an intervention with low-SES Hispanic American college students in Texas (Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003). All students in the study were assigned student mentors. Experimental group mentors told their charges that intelligence was changeable and substantially under their control and taught them how the brain can make new connections throughout life. A website reinforced the mentors’ message. It showed pictures of the brain and explained how neurons make new connections with one another, reflecting the learning that takes place when a person solves new problems. The mentors also helped the students design their own web pages, using their own words and pictures, that reinforced the message of the malleability of intelligence. Control group mentors gave the students cautionary information about drugs and encouraged them to avoid taking them.

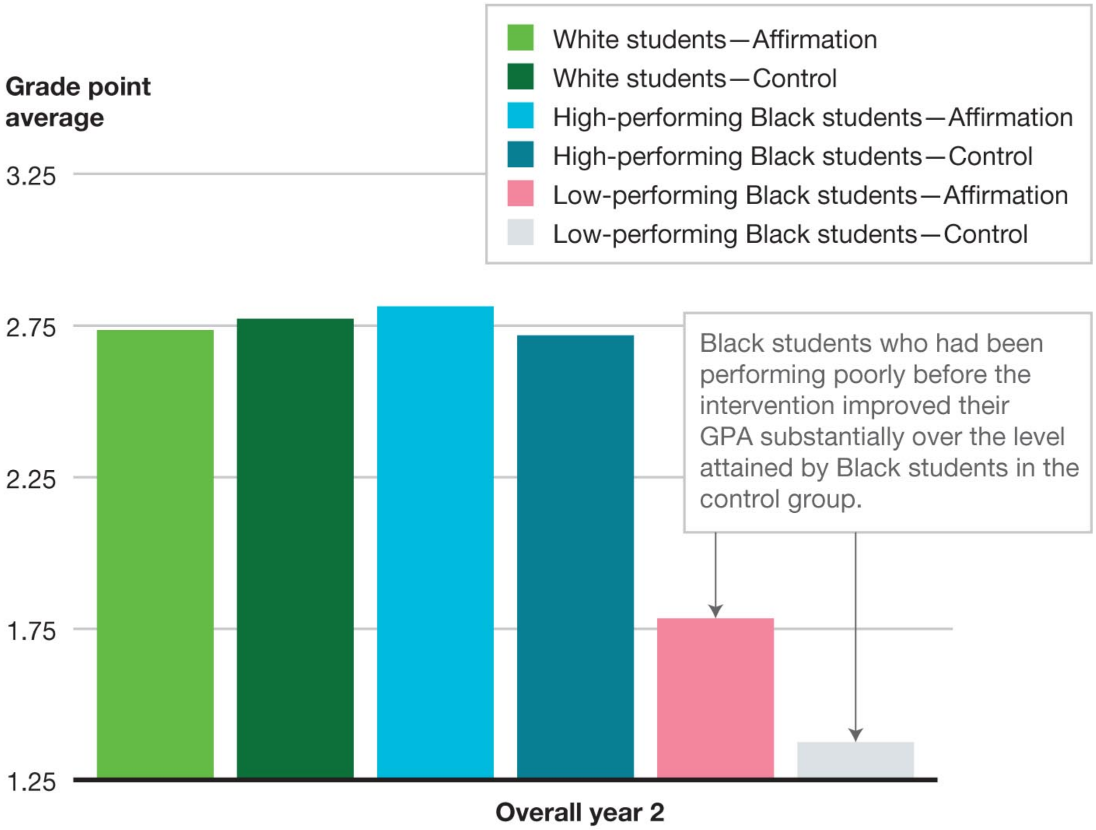
> “Education is not filling a bucket but lighting a fire.”
>
> —WILLIAM B. YEATS

The experimental intervention had a very large effect. On a statewide academic achievement test, the boys in the experimental group scored much higher in math than those in the control group did. For the girls, who tend to worry that they’re naturally less talented in math because of their gender, the difference was even greater. In tests of reading skills, both boys and girls in the experimental group did substantially better than students in the control group did.

Dweck and her colleagues performed a similar intervention with low-SES Black and Latino seventh-grade students in New York City (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007). As in the Texas project, the investigators presented convincing demonstrations of the changes in knowledge and intelligence that are produced by work and study. They taught the students psychological theories about learning, showed them changes in neurotransmission that occur with learning, and demonstrated the kinds of study skills that would most likely increase their knowledge and intelligence. Junior high is a difficult time for many students, but it seems to be particularly hard for disadvantaged children of color. The math performance of control students in the study grew worse as junior high school went on, but students in the experimental group did not show the same decline. They initially had held entity beliefs about intelligence and feared they were doomed to poor performance because they were incorrigibly unintelligent. Simply being made to believe that their intelligence was under their control had a significant impact on their academic performance.

Daphna Oyserman and her colleagues (2006) carried out a different intervention with low-SES Black junior high students in Detroit. They asked the students to think about what kind of future they wanted to have, what difficulties they might encounter along the way to achieving it, how they could deal with those problems, and which of their friends would be most helpful. The researchers supplemented these sessions by having students work in small groups on how to respond to everyday problems, manage social difficulties and academic issues, and cope with the process of getting to high school graduation. The intervention had a modest effect on grade point average (GPA) and standardized test scores and a very large effect on the likelihood of being held back a grade in school.

A study by Geoffrey Cohen and his colleagues (2006) showed that simply having students from marginalized groups write about their most important values at the beginning of middle school substantially improved their grades. The students were enrolled in a mostly middle-class integrated suburban school. As is often true in such schools, the Black students had significantly lower grades than the White students did. The Black students were well aware of this, and the social psychologists who conducted the study assumed that these students were subject to worries prompted by stereotype threat. The researchers reasoned that if the students were encouraged to think about their most important values, this self-affirmation in the school context would produce a sense of efficacy and belongingness. In fact, Black students who were exposed to the affirmation intervention performed better over the term than Black students in the control group did (**Figure A2.1**). During the term in which the intervention took place, the students in the affirmation condition reduced the achievement gap with White students by 40 percent, and their likelihood of getting a D or worse was cut in half.



Black students who had been performing poorly before the intervention improved their GPA substantially over the level attained by Black students in the control group.

FIGURE A2.1 **BLOCKING STEREOTYPE THREAT** This figure shows mean GPAs in core courses the year after some students experienced an affirmation intervention (by being asked to write out their most important values). Initially low-performing Black students improved their academic performance if exposed to the intervention. Source: Adapted from Cohen et al., 2009.

It’s sad but true that many effective interventions, including educational ones, tend to fade over time. Remarkably, that wasn’t true for the self-affirmation intervention. Cohen and his colleagues (2009) followed the students over the next two years and found that the effects of the intervention endured. The likelihood of needing remediation was reduced from 18 percent to 5 percent. Interestingly, the intervention had no effect on Black students who had performed well before entering middle school; presumably, they were sufficiently confident already and the affirmation manipulation was unnecessary. Nor did the affirmation manipulation have any effect on White students, whether previously high performing or not.

Still more impressive, Cohen and his colleagues found marked effects of their intervention after their participants had left high school (Goyer et al., 2017). Black (but not White) students who had been in the experimental group were much more likely to be enrolled in college, and among those in college, experimental group subjects were more likely than the control group subjects to be enrolled in prestigious four-year colleges.

The Cohen group also found very marked effects of their intervention on Latino junior high school students. Experimental group participants were much more likely than control group participants to choose college readiness courses and half as likely to be enrolled in a remedial clinic.

Why were the Cohen interventions so effective? Cohen and his colleagues argue that the intervention had immediate effects that cascaded to alter the students’ life course (Goyer et al., 2017). The intervention gave students a sense of purpose, optimism, and belonging, which changed the educational choices they made. Those choices in turn had beneficial downstream consequences. Cohen and colleagues described their intervention as having *recursive* effects: It produced immediate improvements in performance, which led to still further improvements, and so on, potentially affecting the students’ full life span.

Social Fears and Academic Achievement

Together with Gregory Walton, Cohen explored the effects of other types of concerns on the part of students of color, this time in a college context (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Most first-year undergraduates worry about social acceptance and fitting in on campus, and this is particularly true for students of color. If they fail to make friends, perhaps because of the dearth of other people of color or their discomfort with students from other backgrounds, they may begin to wonder whether they belong on campus. As a result, their motivation may flag, and their GPAs may suffer as well.

Walton and Cohen (2007) reasoned that lagging performance could be reversed if these students knew that worries about social acceptance are common for all students, regardless of ethnicity, and that their experience was likely to improve in the future. The researchers performed a seemingly modest intervention with Black students at a prestigious private university. They invited Black and White freshmen to participate in a psychology study at the end of their freshman year. They intended to convince an experimental group that worries about social acceptance were common for students of all ethnicities but tended to vanish as time went on and they made more friends. The experimenters expected that this information would help Black students realize that the best way to understand their social difficulties wasn’t in terms of their race (“I guess my kind of people don’t really belong at this kind of place”) but as part of the student experience common to everyone (“I guess everybody has these kinds of problems”). The researchers believed that recognition of the common problem—and that it was likely to get better—would help keep the students from worrying about belonging, thereby enabling them to focus on academic achievement.

To drive the point home, Walton and Cohen had students in the experimental group write an essay about the likelihood that their social situation would improve in the future. Then the students made a videotaped speech that would allegedly be used to show new students what college would be like. This standard dissonance manipulation—getting participants to say publicly something different from their own views—was intended to enhance the effects of the persuasive communication they had received earlier.

The researchers measured student behavior related to academic achievement over the next week and recorded student GPAs the subsequent semester. The intervention had a large positive effect on Black but not White students. In the period after the intervention, Black students reported studying more, making more contacts with professors, and attending more review sessions and study group meetings. The subsequent term, the grades of the Black students in the experimental group reflected these behaviors: Their grades were much higher than those of Black students in the control group.

College is also a social challenge for first-generation college students—the first in their families to pursue education beyond high school. The attitudes and values these students encounter in college are typically different from those they were exposed to in their families and neighborhoods. Working-class people, for example, are generally more interdependent than middle-class and upper-middle-class people. For students of working-class origin, going to college isn’t so much an individual achievement as an accomplishment having deep social and interpersonal meaning.

To examine the impact of this difference in prior experience and orientation, Nicole Stephens, Stephanie Fryberg, and their colleagues (2012) wrote two different welcome letters for new students. One, modeled on the usual university welcome letter, emphasized independent values such as exploring personal interests, expressing ideas and opinions, and participating in independent research. The other emphasized learning by being part of a community, working with and learning from others, and participating in collaborative research. The students were then asked to give a 5-minute speech about their college goals. The investigators examined the students’ stress levels during the speech by measuring blood cortisol (a stress hormone) and by the emotional content of the speech. The cortisol level of first-generation students who had read the independent welcome letter was greater during the speech than it was for those who had read the interdependent letter, whereas the interdependent letter had no effect on the non-first-generation students. The emotional content of the speech reflected more emotional strain for first-generation students who read the independent letter than for those who read the interdependent letter, whereas the manipulation had no effect on the content of other students’ speeches. The researchers concluded that there is a mismatch between the values of working-class students and the new college environment—a mismatch that can impair academic performance but that can be combated.

A similar intervention by the Stephens group emphasized that working-class origins, although having some disadvantages, also had advantages that students could capitalize on in college (Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014). Experimental group participants had better academic outcomes than control participants did and showed a greater degree of physiological evidence of thriving in the college environment (Stephens et al., 2015).

Teaching With Entertainment-Education

Which reality television show depicted young people traveling around the countryside and featured such contests as how to repel the sexual advances of other young people? And in which states did the show air? You probably don’t know. It’s *Haath Se Haath Mila* (*Hand in Hand Together*), and it was broadcast in the states of Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttaranchal—in India. It was designed to alert young people to the risks of HIV/AIDS, which existed in epidemic proportions in that country. The young people in the show, by the way, traveled in separate his-and-hers buses. The program was part of a worldwide network of TV shows collectively called entertainment-education.

TEACHING WITH TELENOVELAS These actors are running through a scene on the set of the Mexican telenovela *Heridas de Amor* (*Wounds of Love*).

Albert Bandura is a learning theorist, a scientist who studies how humans and other animals learn which events signal impending rewards and which signal impending punishments. He was one of the first scientists to approach the question of how people learn appropriate and effective social behavior (Bandura, 1973). A fundamental principle of his theory is that people learn what to approach and what to avoid simply by watching relevant others. They observe other people’s behavior and its consequences, adopt the behaviors that seem to be successful, and avoid those that are punished.

The Mexican television producer Miguel Sabido read about Bandura’s principles of social learning and decided to create TV shows that would educate people about effective and rewarding social behaviors while persuading them to avoid dangerous and unproductive ones. He produced the original entertainment-education telenovelas (similar to soap operas) in the 1970s and 1980s.

Each of Sabido’s telenovelas is a yearlong story that focuses on a specific value in the lives of three types of characters: positive role models, negative role models, and “doubters,” or those who fall in between (Singhal, Rogers, & Brown, 1993). There are typically four positive role models complemented by four negative role models: a character who approves of the value being promoted (and one who disapproves), one who promotes the value (and one who does not), one who exercises the value (and one who does not), and one who validates the value (and one who does not). There are also three doubters. One of the doubters accepts the value about a third of the way through the series, one about two-thirds of the way through, and one never accepts the value.

(The third doubter usually dies a painful death.) In general, those who accept the value are immediately rewarded, and those who don’t are punished. Throughout the series, epilogues are inserted in which a famous individual speaks to the audience in an effort to reinforce the value.

These broadcasts clearly have an effect on behavior, although much of the early evidence has to be categorized as anecdotal, coming as it does from Bandura’s own accounts of their success (Bandura, 2004). One of Sabido’s early telenovelas urged viewers to enroll in a literacy program. The day after it first appeared, about 25,000 people descended on the distribution center in downtown Mexico City to obtain their reading materials. The result was a monumental traffic jam in the city. The name of the series was *Ven Conmigo* (*Come With Me*), and in the year it aired, enrollment in literacy classes went up tenfold—from about 90,000 to about 900,000. Another drama, *Acompaname* (*Accompany Me*), emphasized family planning. Those who viewed the program were more inclined to think that having fewer children was likely to have social, economic, and psychological benefits. There was a 32 percent increase in new contraceptive users, and national sales of contraceptives went up markedly.

Sabido’s telenovelas have been widely imitated. An Indian drama inspired by Sabido’s work promoted female rights and family planning. Amazingly, the enrollment of girls in elementary schools rose from 10 percent to 38 percent during the year the series was broadcast. After a family planning telenovela aired in Kenya, contraception practices changed across all socioeconomic levels (Westoff & Rodriguez, 1995).

A radio soap opera designed to combat the spread of HIV in Tanzania spanned four years (P. W. Vaughn et al., 2000). Investigators conducted a proper experiment to test for its effects. For the first two years of the program, the soap opera wasn’t broadcast in a particular region in Tanzania in order to provide a comparison group. In regions where it aired, the soap opera resulted in a reduction in the number of sexual partners and increased condom use. The mediating factors that seemed to be crucial in producing these changes were increased self-efficacy, increased communication about HIV, and increased risk awareness. In interviews, listeners said they identified with the characters in the soap opera and tried to emulate them, consistent with the tenets of social learning theory.

Statistics, Social Science Methodology, and Critical Thinking

Consider the following two problems:

1. David is a high school senior choosing between two colleges. He has friends at both. His friends at college A like it a lot on social and academic grounds. His friends at college B aren't as satisfied and are generally unenthusiastic about the college experience. David visits each college for a day. He meets some students at college A who aren't very interesting and a professor who gives him a curt brush-off. He meets several students at college B who are lively and intelligent, and a couple of professors take a personal interest in him. Which college do you think he should go to? Why?
2. Medical research has established that drinking a moderate amount of alcohol is associated with a reduced risk of getting cancer or heart disease. Assume you are a teetotaler on economic and moral grounds. Should you start modest tippling?

Problem 1: If you said that David should go to college B because he has to choose for himself (not let his friends choose for him), you're in good company with most undergraduates. However, you should also have considered that although David's samples of the two colleges were based on his own personal experiences, the samples weren't very large. The experiences he could expect to have at the two colleges might be very different from his one-day visits. His friends, while they aren't David, at least have the advantage of having much larger samples of what life is like at the two schools. Their opinions ought to give David, and you, pause. Moreover, there may have been an attempt to ensure that David got a biased sample of events at college B. If friends at college B were particularly eager to get David to go there, they might have arranged things to impress David favorably.

Problem 2: If you said it’ s best to keep your wallet in your pocket and your foot off the bar rail, then you recognized that correlation doesn’ t establish causation. Indeed, after decades of hearing from researchers that alcohol in moderation is a disease preventive, some scientists are now saying that the association between moderate drinking and health may be a self-selection effect having nothing to do with the effects of alcohol. People who don’ t drink may avoid doing so because their health is already poor or because their income discourages them from drinking (and income is strongly correlated with health). And people who drink a lot may be damaging their health. That leaves the middle-of-the-roaders as the healthiest group, but not because alcohol in moderation is making them healthy.

As we’ ve emphasized throughout this book, social psychology promotes the statistical and methodological analysis of everyday life events. Taking statistics courses and science courses that emphasize research principles is an excellent way to start using those principles for solving everyday life problems and for critiquing media accounts of scientific research. But courses such as social psychology, which teach those principles in the context of analyzing real-world events, provide an additional boost.

Darrin Lehman and Richard Nisbett (1990) studied the effects of four years of college study in the humanities, the natural sciences, psychology, or the social sciences. Students majoring in psychology and the social sciences showed a 65 percent improvement in their ability to reason using appropriate statistical and methodological principles like the ones just discussed. Students in the humanities and natural sciences improved by only about 25 percent. (Lest you think few advantages in reasoning come from studying the humanities and natural sciences, students in those fields improved by 65 percent in various kinds of logical reasoning, and students in psychology and the social sciences improved not at all in those respects.)

Two years of graduate-level training in psychology have a huge impact on people' s ability to apply statistical and methodological principles to everyday life—particularly for students in the areas of psychology that deal with ordinary human behavior, such as social psychology, developmental psychology, and personality psychology (D. R. Lehman, Lempert, & Nisbett, 1988). Improvements are less for students focusing on the fields of biopsychology, cognitive psychology, or cognitive neuroscience, even though students in those fields are trained in basic statistics and methodology. Students of chemistry and law gain absolutely nothing in their ability to apply statistical and methodological reasoning to everyday life events.

Improving one' s ability to apply statistical and scientific reasoning doesn' t require immersion in higher education. Research by social psychologists shows that statistical and methodological principles, as well as economic concepts such as the cost-benefit principle, can be taught in very brief sessions (G. T. Fong, Krantz, & Nisbett, 1986; Larrick, Morgan, & Nisbett, 1990; Larrick, Nisbett, & Morgan, 1993; Nisbett et al., 1987). In some of these studies, the researchers phoned participants several weeks after the training sessions in the guise of pollsters conducting an "opinion survey." The survey presented various personal and institutional dilemmas for which a grasp of the statistical and methodological principles would dictate a particular answer. Trained participants were more likely to provide answers that conformed to the relevant principles.

You’ve learned a great deal from this text (and the course you’ve just taken) about how to think critically about everyday life events and how to evaluate the thinking of others, including your friends and acquaintances as well as the media. This gift of critical thinking is one that keeps on giving: The more you use these critical thinking principles, the more you’re apt to invoke them in an ever-broadening range of circumstances. The effects will be recursive, in other words.

Module Review

SUMMARY

Pygmalion in the Classroom

- Teachers' expectations can influence students' academic achievement. Believing a child is talented or is about to show a spurt in ability may lead to better performance from the child. Expectation effects may be particularly large for lower-SES students and students of color.

Intelligence: Thing or Process?

- According to the *incremental theory of intelligence*, people can improve their intelligence by working hard on challenging tasks.
- The *entity theory of intelligence* holds that intelligence is an unchangeable thing (entity) over which people have no control. Entity theorists tend to attribute failures to lack of ability and aren't likely to learn new things by taking on challenges.
- People can shift from being entity theorists to being incremental theorists, thereby improving their academic performance; this is especially true for students of color.

Culture and Achievement

- East Asians tend to be incremental theorists and thereby reap the benefits of hard work and improve their abilities.

Blocking Stereotype Threat in the Classroom

- When students from historically marginalized groups are persuaded that their ability is under their control, they work harder and perform at higher levels. The same is true when they’re asked to think about their goals in life and how to achieve them.

Social Fears and Academic Achievement

- Concerns about social acceptance can hold back students of color from engaging in college life and having academic success. Showing them that social acceptance will improve can result in greater well-being and higher grades.
- Colleges typically emphasize the value of an education in terms of independence and personal achievement. When they shift to an emphasis on interdependent values, the performance of first-generation students is likely to benefit.

Teaching With Entertainment-Education

- Entertainment-education, based on Bandura’s social learning theory and the success of telenovelas, can increase the likelihood that people will avoid risky behavior and pursue beneficial goals.

Statistics, Social Science Methodology, and Critical Thinking

- Statistics and social science methodology, including methods used in social psychology, increase critical thinking skills, enabling people to spot the mistakes in reported scientific studies and reduce errors of judgment in their own lives.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. On the first day of summer volleyball camp, what is likely to happen if the camp counselors are told that the campers in cabin 1 are on the verge of a growth and strength spurt compared with the campers in cabin 2? How large will the effect of this manipulation probably be? What factors would increase or reduce the impact of this manipulation?
2. Suppose Alex is choosing between two math classes for next semester. She can take either Math 301, which is outside her comfort zone but would teach her new skills, or Math 210, which is well within her domain of knowledge and in which she’d probably get an A. If Alex is an entity theorist, which class is she likely to select? Do you think entity versus incremental theorists differ in their overall GPA?
3. How would you change your college’s first-year welcome program to help reduce achievement differences among students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education (such as Black and first-generation college students)?

The answer guidelines for the Think About It questions can be found at the back of the book . . .

ONLINE STUDY MATERIALS

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APPLICATION
MODULE
3

Social Psychology and the Law

OUTLINE

- Before a Case Goes to Trial
- Inside the Courtroom
- Punishment
- Perceptions of Fairness of the Criminal Justice System

ON A BRIGHT WINTER DAY IN 1989, 29-year-old Eileen Franklin suddenly recalled a horror. She remembered that 20 years before, she had seen her best friend, 8-year-old Susan Nason, murdered. The murderer, silhouetted by the sun, had lifted a heavy rock and crushed Susan's skull. Eileen recalled covering her ears to block the sound of shattering bones. As her memory grew sharper, she realized the murderer had been her own father, George Franklin. In the ensuing days, more details of the incident flooded her mind. She finally went to the police and told them about her recovered memory. Her father was sentenced to life imprisonment based solely on his daughter's testimony, even though some of Eileen's remarkably detailed memories were consistent with botched newspaper accounts rather than the actual facts of the case (Loftus & Ketcham, 1994). Franklin was convicted despite the testimony of psychologist Elizabeth Loftus that "recovered" memories can be utterly mistaken—that is, people can "remember" things that never happened. In fact, Eileen's memory *was* inaccurate. After serving 6 years in prison, Franklin was proved innocent and released. Loftus's testimony, which was at odds with views about memory held not only by the general public but also by many cognitive psychologists at the time, highlights the important role psychology can play in understanding the procedures that take place in a court of law.

The processes involved in a court case can be separated into three distinct phases: (1) pretrial events, including, in the case of criminal trials, eyewitness identification, attempts to elicit confessions, and efforts to distinguish lies from sincere efforts to tell the truth; (2) issues related to the trial itself, including jury selection, jury deliberation, and jury size; and (3) posttrial events, such as the administration of punishment. Social psychologists have made important contributions to each of these aspects of jurisprudence, often by identifying flaws in existing practices and suggesting improvements. The criminal justice system has instituted quite a few changes in police practice and judicial procedures in response to social psychological findings—a testament to how the discoveries of social psychology can be used to improve an important social institution. ■

Before a Case Goes to Trial

You have probably seen many legal dramas on TV and in movies that unfold in a fairly predictable fashion: A crime occurs, the police investigate, witnesses identify one or more suspects, those suspects are interrogated, and the criminal does or does not confess. In real life, however, the process is not always so simple or straightforward.

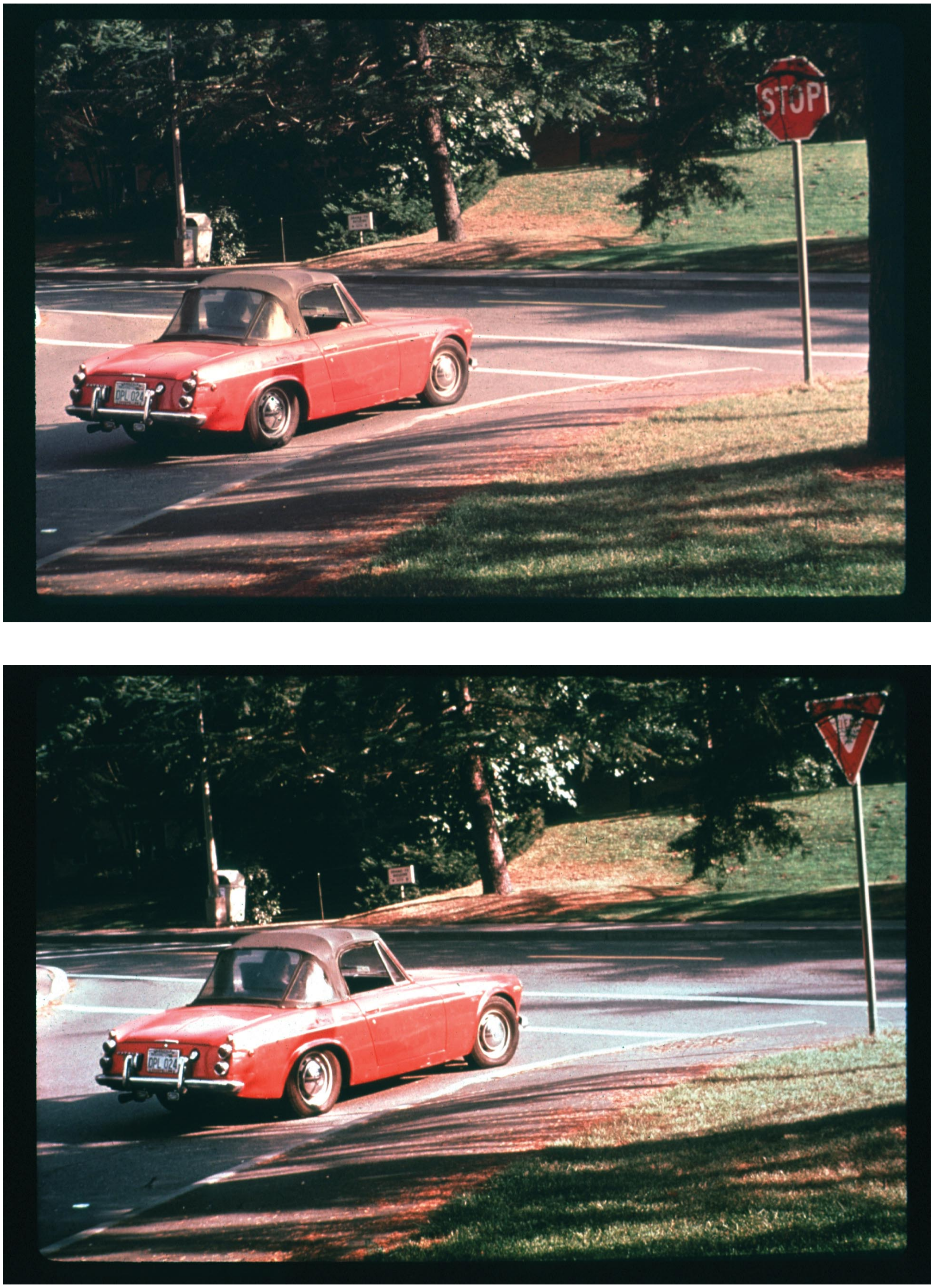
Eyewitness Testimony

Almost nothing that comes before the jury in a criminal trial is more convincing than a witness who, pointing to the defendant, says, “I’m certain that is the person.” Every year, 75,000 eyewitnesses testify against suspects in criminal cases in the United States. But their identifications are wrong about a third of the time (Liptak, 2011). In fact, more than half of all wrongful convictions have involved eyewitness errors (Kovera & Borgida, 2010). In some instances when people have been exonerated by DNA evidence establishing that they could not have committed the crime in question, more than one person had wrongly identified the convicted person as the perpetrator.

Social psychologists have studied many factors that can influence the accuracy of eyewitness testimony. Before you read about them, however, take the following test. Indicate which of the statements seem to be true and which false. On a piece of paper, write T or F for each statement to keep yourself honest before you check the answers. You don’t want to fall prey to the hindsight bias (or the “I-knew-it-all-along,” effect; see Chapter 2).

1. Accurate eyewitnesses are generally more confident than inaccurate ones.

2. Witnesses are generally as accurate in identifying perpetrators of a race different from their own as they are in identifying perpetrators of their own race.
3. When the circumstances of a crime are highly stressful and arousing, the memory of an eyewitness is likely to be more accurate than when the events are less arousing.
4. Witnesses with accurate memory for many details about the crime context (for example, how many doors were in the room) generally are more accurate in their testimony about perpetrators than witnesses with less accurate memory for details.
5. Asking witnesses to help construct a face composite of the perpetrator generally improves the accuracy with which the perpetrator can be identified.
6. Asking witnesses to describe a perpetrator before they attempt to identify the perpetrator from photos or a lineup generally increases the accuracy of recognition.
7. Witnesses who rapidly single out an individual from photos or a lineup are generally less accurate than those who take a longer time to consider who they believe to be the perpetrator.
8. Juries are generally capable of distinguishing correct testimony from incorrect testimony.



THE EFFECT OF MISLEADING QUESTIONS Participants in this study saw either the picture on the left or the one on the right. Many of those asked about the “stop sign” later reported that they had seen the stop sign even if they had actually seen the yield sign; many of those asked about the “yield sign” reported that they had seen the yield sign even if they had seen the stop sign.

THE PERSISTENCE OF MEMORY One of the greatest triumphs of the field of psychology is the discovery that memory is not a passive registry of the information a person has encountered. Instead, irrefutable evidence shows that memory is an active, constructive process in which inferences about “what must have been” guide memories of “what was.” Through a series of ingenious studies that began in the late 1970s and early 1980s, researchers have established that memories are inferences, not stored photographs or infallible representations, and they can be affected by all kinds of information that becomes available after an event has occurred.

In one striking demonstration, Loftus and her colleagues showed participants a series of slides of an automobile accident (Loftus, Miller, & Burns, 1978). The image on one of the slides was different for one group of participants than for the other. Half were shown a red Datsun stopped at a stop sign, and half were shown the Datsun stopped at a yield sign. Participants were asked questions about the accident they had “witnessed.” One crucial question was different for two groups of participants. Participants were asked either “Did another car pass the red Datsun while it was stopped at the stop sign?” or “Did another car pass the red Datsun while it was stopped at the yield sign?” Later, the participants were shown the two pictures and asked which one they had seen before. Of those who had earlier been asked about the sign they had actually seen (stop sign or yield sign), 75 percent identified the correct picture. Of those who had been asked about the sign they hadn’t seen, only 41 percent identified the correct picture.

> “Memory can change the shape of a room; it can change the color of a car. And memories can be distorted. They’re just an interpretation, they’re not a record.”
>
> —LEONARD SHELBY, PROTAGONIST IN THE FILM *MEMENTO*

In other research, Loftus and her colleagues found that people could be led to believe, incorrectly, that a robber had a mustache and that a red light was green (Loftus, 2001). Of course, most of the time when investigators give misleading information to witnesses, they are not deliberately trying to trick them. Instead, they often operate with patchy or mistaken details and may convey such misinformation to witnesses. In the courtroom, however, attorneys sometimes exercise poetic license in their phraseology in order to lead witnesses in a specific direction.

Research on eyewitness identification is relevant to psychotherapists’ claims that their patients have “recovered” memories that they had forgotten or repressed for decades. People have been convicted of heinous crimes based on the reports of adults whose therapists helped them “remember” episodes of abuse or even murder. People are also sometimes convicted of child abuse based solely on the testimony of children who have been questioned by police.

Undoubtedly, some of these recovered memories are valid. But consider a demonstration reported by Elizabeth Loftus and Jacqueline Pickrell (1995) in which the researchers successfully “implanted” memories in 24 university students. For each participating student, the researchers persuaded the student’s relatives to tell the student stories about several events that had occurred around the time the student was 5 years old. Relatives were also asked to generate a plausible—though untrue—story about the student having been lost as a

5-year-old. Six of the participants eventually “recalled” the made-up event, sometimes providing substantial detail over the course of a series of interviews. Thus, 25 percent of randomly selected undergraduates were readily persuaded of the existence of a non-event—and could even provide details about it. Upon being told that one of the episodes never occurred, most of those students could not identify which one it was.

BOX A3.1

FOCUS ON LEGAL TESTIMONY

Certain, but Wrong

This account is excerpted from a *New York Times* article by Jennifer Thompson.

> In 1984 I was a 22-year-old college student. . . . One night someone broke into my apartment, put a knife to my throat and raped me.
>
> During my ordeal . . . I studied every single detail on the rapist’s face. I looked at his hairline; I looked for scars, for tattoos, for anything that would help me identify him. When and if I survived the attack, I was going to make sure that he was put in prison and he was going to rot.
>
> . . . Looking at a series of police photos, I identified my attacker. I knew this was the man. I was completely confident. I was sure.
>
> I picked the same man in a lineup. Again, I was sure. I knew it. I had picked the right guy, and he

was going to go to jail. If there was the possibility of a death sentence, I wanted him to die. I wanted to flip the switch.

. . . Based on my testimony, Ronald Junior Cotton was sentenced to prison for life. It was the happiest day of my life because I could begin to put it all behind me. . . .

In 1995, 11 years after I had first identified Ronald Cotton, I was asked to provide a blood sample so that DNA tests could be run on evidence from the rape. . . .

I will never forget the day I learned about the DNA results. . . . They [the detective and the prosecuting attorney] told me: “Ronald Cotton didn’t rape you. It was Bobby Poole.”

RECONCILIATION Ronald Cotton and Jennifer Thompson share a moment after Mr. Cotton served 11 years in prison for a crime he didn’t commit, based largely on an inaccurate eyewitness identification by Ms. Thompson.

> . . . The man I had identified so emphatically . . . was absolutely innocent.
>
> Ronald Cotton was released from prison after serving 11 years. . . .
>
> Ronald Cotton and I are the same age, so I knew what he had missed during those 11 years. My life had gone on. I had gotten married. I had graduated from college. I worked. I was a parent. Ronald Cotton hadn't gotten to do any of that . . . (J. Thompson, 2000).

In similar studies with children, Stephen Ceci and Maggie Bruck (1995) asked preschoolers to remember as much as they could, in weekly sessions for ten weeks, about the time they went "to the hospital with a mousetrap on your finger." When these preschoolers were interviewed later by another adult, 58 percent were able to tell detailed stories about the non-event. One boy remembered that "we went to the hospital, and my mommy, daddy, and Colin drove me there, to the hospital in our van, because it was far away. And the doctor put a bandage on this finger" (Ceci & Bruck, 1995, p. 219). Researchers, including Loftus, Ceci, and their colleagues, have thus established that memories, like perceptions and judgments, should not be considered direct readouts of reality.

FACTORS AFFECTING EYEWITNESS ACCURACY Given the generalization that memory is highly imperfect and highly susceptible to information provided after an event (or non-event) occurs, it's not surprising that eyewitness testimony is far from completely reliable. What factors influence whether such testimony is accurate and whether it is believed? Recall the statements about eyewitness testimony you read earlier. If you guessed that each statement was false, you were 100 percent correct.

IMPROVING EYEWITNESS IDENTIFICATION PROCEDURES Fortunately, a massive amount of research by social and cognitive psychologists on the accuracy of eyewitness testimony has had a significant effect on the law. In the 1990s, a panel of researchers, lawyers, and police from Canada and the United States developed a set of procedures to reduce eyewitness errors (Wells et al., 2000). And a landmark decision by the New Jersey Supreme Court, *State v. Henderson* (2011), drawing heavily on the findings of psychological research, established a set of rules judges must follow in evaluating the reliability of eyewitness testimony.

It is a great credit to psychologists that they have produced so much useful knowledge about the reliability of eyewitness testimony and the possible biases of jurors (Brewer & Wells, 2011). It’ s also a great credit to policy makers that this research has been allowed to transform policing and judicial practices.

Getting the Truth From Suspects

Guilty offenders sometimes confess to their crimes, in which case the trial proceedings are relatively straightforward. Juries and judges simply attempt to arrive at a punishment that fits the admitted crime. But sometimes the guilty party does not admit to committing the crime. In the past, torture was frequently used to elicit confessions from suspects. The assumption was that if people were truly innocent, they would never confess. But in fact, people sometimes confess—even without torture—to crimes they did not commit.

FALSE CONFESSIONS In 1989, five teenage boys were arrested for a horrific assault and rape of a woman who had been jogging in Central Park in New York. The woman was beaten nearly to death and was initially not expected to survive, although in a recovery regarded as miraculous, she suffered only minor permanent damage. All five of the boys confessed to the crime, and they were given long prison sentences. Thirteen years after the crime, Matias Reyes, who was not one of the five boys, admitted to having been the sole perpetrator of the crime. DNA evidence, which had not been presented at the boys’ trial, corroborated Reyes’s admission (Burns, 2011).

Why would the boys have confessed to a crime they had not committed? They had been up to no good in the park—they had been assaulting people—and during the interrogation they were probably in a state of extreme stress because they knew they were in fact guilty of something. In addition, they were subjected to pretty much standard police procedure, in which the suspect is questioned in a bare, soundproof room—a situation that has the effect of making the suspect feel alone and helpless. The most widely used manual for police interrogations advises a ninefold process for questioning suspects in that situation (Inbau et al., 2001): (1) Insist that the suspect committed the crime; (2) present helpful excuses for why the suspect might have committed the crime; (3) cut off the suspect’s pleas of innocence; (4) defeat the suspect’s objections to the charges; (5) don’t let the increasingly silent suspect succeed in ignoring the interrogator; (6) express sympathy for why the suspect might have committed the crime in an effort to draw out a confession; (7) offer the suspect an explanation for the crime that would make him feel justified in committing it; (8) if possible, get the suspect to spell out details of the crime; and (9) convert those details into a written confession. If those tactics don’t suffice, police may offer sympathy and promise leniency in light of the supposed extenuating circumstances. These procedures often succeed in getting suspects to confess.

The problem, as in the case of the Central Park jogger, is that these police tactics can be altogether too effective, sometimes eliciting false confessions. In fact, in cases where defendants had been convicted and later proved innocent by DNA tests, as many as one-fifth had confessed to the crime (Garrett, 2008). The young and inexperienced may be particularly susceptible. The five teenagers in the Central Park jogger case were interrogated for up to 30 hours before they gave their confessions, which were filmed. The defendants later testified that they had been threatened and that promises of various kinds had been made if they would confess. (The police denied these charges.) Because of their naiveté, the boys reported believing they would be allowed to go home if they just admitted to what they were said to have done.

JURIES AND CONFESSIONS Saul Kassin and Holly Sukel (1997) suspected that confessions made under dubious circumstances might still be taken at face value by jurors. To examine this hypothesis, they presented mock jurors with an account of a murder trial. In one condition, the suspect never admitted committing the crime, and the participants voted guilty 19 percent of the time. In a second condition, the suspect had reportedly confessed, and the conviction rate rose to 62 percent. In a third condition, the suspect had confessed but in a situation in which he was afraid and in pain while handcuffed behind his back. Although these participants generally recognized that the confession had been coerced, 50 percent of them voted for conviction anyway; they chose to believe the defendant’ s confession, even if it was forced and even when they were told to ignore it because the judge had ruled it inadmissible.

Can jurors recognize whether a confession is real or fake when they’ re allowed to watch a video of the interrogation? Not necessarily. In another study, Kassin and his team filmed prison inmates confessing either to a crime they had actually committed or to one they had not committed (Kassin, Meissner, & Norwick, 2005). College students and police investigators watched the video and indicated whether the inmate had or had not actually committed the crime. Neither the students nor the police were particularly accurate, but the police tended to be quite confident in their judgments.

In response to research like this, some state and local governments now require that the entire interrogation of suspects be filmed. But as Kassin’ s research shows, doing so provides no guarantee that confessions will be genuine or that jurors will be able to recognize which confessions are genuine and which are not.

Inside the Courtroom

The Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution stipulates: “In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed.” How does the government in the relevant state and district assemble an impartial jury? And how large should the jury be? We typically think of juries of 12 people, but would a smaller number suffice? What decision rule should juries follow in rendering a verdict? Most jurisdictions require a unanimous decision, but some allow less stringent agreement. How do these differences affect the nature of jury deliberation and the kinds of verdicts juries deliver? Social psychologists have conducted research on all these questions to find out which procedures best serve the cause of justice.

Jury Selection

The first step in creating a jury takes place out of the public eye. Local governments—typically county or municipal courts—use a variety of public records, such as voter registration rolls, to compile a list of potential jurors. When a trial is coming up, the court randomly selects individuals from this list. Prospective jurors then appear in court and are interviewed by the judge, the prosecuting attorney, and the defense attorney in a jury-selection procedure known as voir dire (from old French, meaning “to speak the truth”). All three parties ask questions designed to find out whether a prospective juror is reasonably impartial, although the prosecution and defense are usually interested in ensuring that a juror is not biased *against* their side.

To weed out biased jurors, the prosecuting and defense attorneys consult their intuition about human nature and how certain types of people are likely to react to different types of arguments and evidence. Many attorneys believe, for instance, that engineers are stoic (and therefore not inclined to be moved by emotional appeals), that bearded men are unconventional (and therefore unlikely to be swayed by threats to the status quo), and that people of German descent tend to be strict and conservative. Many attorneys also assume that particular types of jurors have special concerns that might lead them to be prejudiced for or against defendants in certain cases—for example, that mothers are especially sympathetic to claims about crimes involving children, that the rich are sensitive to alleged crimes against property, and that Black people are particularly moved by charges of police misconduct.

On the basis of prospective jurors' responses to questions during voir dire, the defense and prosecution can ask the judge to excuse jury candidates "for cause"—that is, because they would not be impartial. Each side is also allowed a certain number of *peremptory challenges*—the right to exclude a prospective juror without offering any justification. Although a great deal of time and energy goes into the jury selection process, psychological research shows that neither lawyers' intuitions about certain kinds of people nor jurors' responses to questions during voir dire are reliable guides to the decisions jurors are likely to reach (Kerr et al., 1991; Olczak, Kaplan, & Penrod, 1991; Zeisel & Diamond, 1978).

SCIENTIFIC JURY SELECTION Recognizing the limits of their intuitions and the questionable value of prospective jurors' responses during voir dire, attorneys have turned increasingly to the practice of scientific jury selection, a statistical approach to selecting (or excluding) jurors likely to be predisposed to certain claims or appeals. Jury selection specialists hired by defense and prosecuting attorneys conduct surveys and compile statistics on how demographic variables—including age, gender, income, and ethnicity—are related to such attitudes as an inclination to trust the government, to admire corporate executives, to care about the environment, or to distrust the police. In scientific jury selection, prospective jurors themselves are not questioned; instead, general associations between certain attitudes and demographic categories are established in the community at large. Scientific jury selection has been used in a great many high-profile trials, including those of former football star O. J. Simpson, television personality Martha Stewart, and hedge fund manager Raj Rajaratnam. Research indicates that the practice can be quite successful (Moran, Cutler, & De Lisa, 1994; Seltzer, 2006), enabling lawyers to know with reasonable accuracy, for instance, whether a prospective juror has a relatively pro-business or anti-business attitude (Hans, 2000). But randomized controlled experiments that would provide the most telling assessment of the practice have not been conducted, and the effectiveness of scientific jury selection is subject to some dispute (Seltzer, 2006; Strier, 1999).

> “Ninety percent of all known executions are carried out in just four countries: China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United States.”
>
> —FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER, *OUR ENDANGERED VALUES*

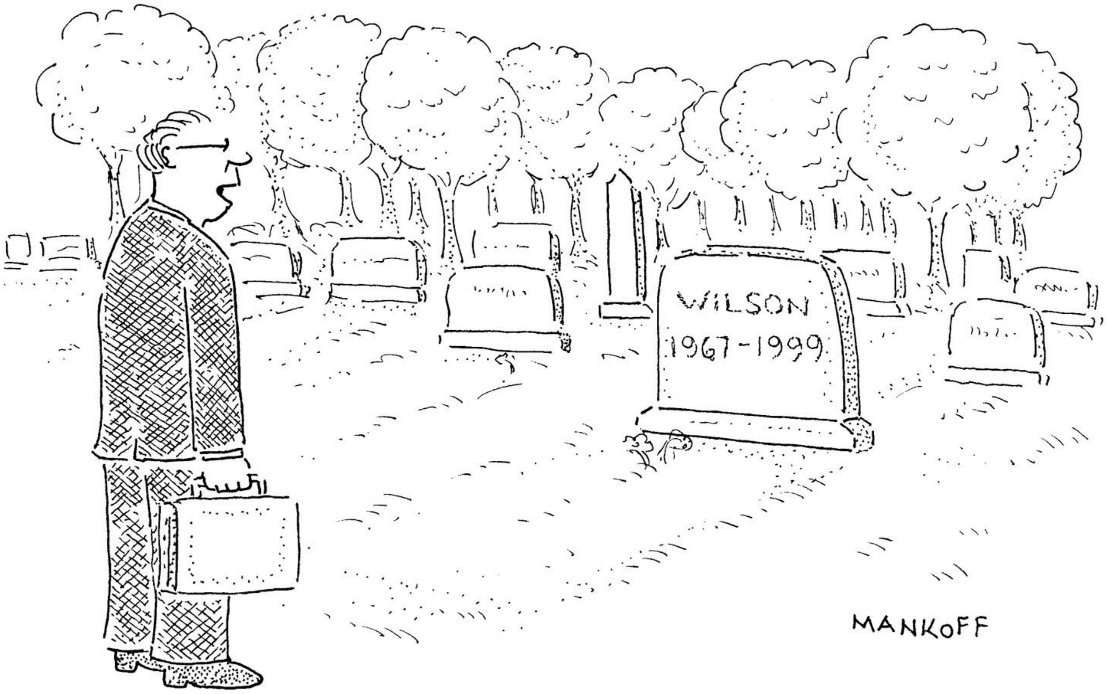
DEATH-QUALIFIED JURIES As you are surely aware, the death penalty is a highly controversial component of the U.S. penal system. Twenty-seven states have the death penalty, although opponents question its effectiveness as a deterrent to crime, the consistency with which it is applied, and the very morality of its use. States with the death penalty do not have lower homicide rates than those without it do. And the homicide rate does not tend to decrease when a state adopts the death penalty, nor does it increase when a state abolishes it (Costanzo, 1997; Haney & Logan, 1994). The overwhelming majority of those who are sentenced to death are poor and cannot afford the kind of defense that wealthy defendants use to maximize their chances of acquittal or, barring that, at least receiving a lesser sentence. Moreover, in recent years, DNA evidence has exonerated many individuals who were convicted of capital crimes they did not commit.

"Please read back that last remark in a more murdery voice."

In many jurisdictions, the jury decides not only whether the individual charged with a capital crime is guilty or innocent but also whether the death penalty is appropriate. If you were on a jury in a capital case that found the accused guilty, would you be willing to sentence the defendant to death? If the answer is no, should you be excluded from the sentencing phase of the trial? Indeed, should people with profound reservations about the death penalty be allowed to serve as jurors in capital cases at all?

Maintaining that it’ s not a good idea to have such people serve as jurors in capital cases, the courts allow the practice of *death qualification*, in which the judge may exclude prospective jurors who say they would never vote for a death sentence. But does the systematic exclusion of people with strong reservations about the death penalty alter not just the sentences handed down but also the verdicts—guilty or not guilty—rendered by death-qualified juries? Psychological research indicates that it does indeed.

People who are willing to recommend the death penalty—and hence death-qualified juries as a whole—tend to be more concerned about crime and more trusting of police than are people who are unwilling to recommend capital punishment. They also tend to be more skeptical of civil liberty procedures that protect the rights of the accused, to have relatively negative views of defense lawyers, and to believe that the world is just and people get what they deserve and deserve what they get (Butler & Moran, 2007; Fitzgerald & Ellsworth, 1984; Haney, Hurtado, & Vega, 1994). In experiments with participants assembled into mock juries who render a hypothetical verdict after watching a video of a real trial, death-qualified juries are more likely to convict than are juries that include individuals with reservations about the death penalty (Cowan, Thompson, & Ellsworth, 1984). In another notable study, merely hearing the questions typically asked in the death qualification part of voir dire tended to bias the jurors toward conviction, presumably because such questions contain an implication of guilt (Haney, 1984). Given these differences between death-qualified juries and those that are not death-qualified, many have questioned whether death-qualified juries really are impartial (Bersoff, 1987). Nevertheless, the U.S. Supreme Court has upheld the permissibility of death-qualified juries, first in *Witherspoon v. Illinois* (1968) and then again in *Lockhart v. McCree* (1986).



"Good news. Your execution was overturned on appeal."

Jury Deliberation

In courtroom dramatizations, it's common for a steadfast and enlightened minority to overcome the impassioned but flawed view of the majority. Although this scenario makes for good drama, it rarely happens in real life. In a landmark study of jury decision making, Harry Kalven and Hans Zeisel (1966) interviewed members of 225 juries. In 215 of them, a majority leaned in one direction or the other at the time of the initial straw vote; in 209 of these cases, the jury ended up handing down a verdict consistent with that initial majority. And in studies using mock juries, the initial majority almost always wins the day (Kerr, 1981; Stasser & Davis, 1981).

JURY DELIBERATION IN FILM In the movie *12 Angry Men*, Henry Fonda plays the only juror who does not vote to convict the defendant on the initial ballot. Slowly, employing one deft persuasion move after another, he wins over the other 11 members of the jury and engineers an acquittal.

Given what social psychologists have learned about conformity pressures and social influence, it’s no surprise that the initial majority so often gets its way. Indeed, studies of jury deliberation have found that the majority view prevails through the very processes of informational and normative social influence discussed in Chapter 8 (Hastie & Kameda, 2005; Kaplan & Schersching, 1981; Stasser & Davis, 1981). However, even though those in the minority rarely succeed in producing the verdict they initially think is correct, they are able to persuade the majority to move in their direction a bit when it comes to sentencing (Pennington & Hastie, 1990).

JURY SIZE Most juries have 12 members, but that number is not specified in the U.S. Constitution, and some states allow smaller juries in noncapital cases. If you were convicted by a 6-person jury, would you think you had received a fair trial? Johnny Williams was in this very situation—convicted of robbery by a 6-person jury in Florida. He understandably thought the outcome might have been different with a larger jury, so he appealed. The Supreme Court, in *Williams v. Florida* (1970), upheld the conviction and affirmed the permissibility of 6-person juries, arguing that “there is no discernible difference between the results reached” by juries of different sizes. Later, in *Ballew v. Georgia* (1978), the Court reaffirmed its earlier opinion but ruled that juries of fewer than 6 people are unconstitutional.

In ruling that there is “no discernible difference” in the verdicts likely to be delivered by 6- and 12-person juries, the Supreme Court based its claim partly on conformity research. One concern of many legal scholars is guarding against the “tyranny of the majority”—that is, a nearly unanimous majority intimidating a slim minority of jurors into swallowing their convictions and caving in to the others. The Court maintained that research by Solomon Asch (1956) established that the amount of conformity pressure felt by the minority varies in proportion to majority and minority opinions. By this logic, minorities in a 5-to-1 or a 10-to-2 split are equally likely to give in to the majority. But that’s not what Asch found (see Chapter 8). Having an ally makes an enormous difference in allowing jurors in the minority to stick to their convictions, so the lone holdout in a 5-to-1 split has a much harder time standing firm than either of the two jurors in a 10-to-2 split. And on purely numerical grounds, someone who dissents from the majority is more likely to have an ally—a bracing partner in dissent—in a group of 12 than in a group of 6. The Supreme Court simply misread the relevant evidence. Indeed, research conducted after the two Supreme Court verdicts has found that 6-person juries are more likely to arrive at unanimous decisions and do so with less deliberation (Saks & Marti, 1997). In mock civil trials as well, 6-person juries tend to spend less time than 12-person juries do deciding how much compensation a plaintiff should receive (J. H. Davis et al., 1997).

JURY DECISION RULE Recall that the Sixth Amendment guarantees anyone accused of a criminal offense “a speedy and public trial.” Having juries with fewer than 12 members is one way to try to accelerate the flow of the large number of cases through the courts. Another way to speed up the pace of trials is to allow less-than-unanimous verdicts. The Supreme Court has twice upheld the permissibility of such decisions in state but not federal criminal trials. In *Apodaca, Cooper, and Madden v. Oregon* (1972), the Court upheld the convictions of three defendants found guilty by a jury operating under a 10-of-12 majority rule. In *Johnson v. Louisiana* (1972), the Court upheld a conviction obtained under a 9-of-12 decision rule. The Court maintained that a “conscientious juror” is concerned with justice, not simply with arriving at a verdict, so having a less-than-unanimous decision rule should not compromise either the length or the vigor of a jury’s deliberation. Robust discussion, the Court argued, would continue well after a sufficiently large majority opinion has developed.

At the heart of the Court’s ruling, then, was an empirical claim—one that social psychologists quickly set out to test. In one ambitious study, Reid Hastie and colleagues (1983) recruited more than 800 people and assembled them into 69 mock juries. After watching a filmed reenactment of a real-world criminal trial, the mock juries rendered verdicts using one of three different decision rules: unanimous, 10-of-12, or 8-of-12. The results were clear: Although the verdicts rendered by juries operating under different decision rules didn’t vary by much, the juries that did not have to achieve unanimity spent much less time discussing the facts of the case and questions of law. The 8-of-12 juries, for example, typically deliberated for less than 5 minutes after reaching a majority of 8 or more. After the decision rule was met, in other words, they all but ignored the holdouts, ended discussion, and announced their verdict. Similar results were obtained from an analysis of recorded civil trials with nonunanimous decision rules in Arizona. Minority opinions were given little attention once a sufficient majority view was reached (S. S. Diamond, Rose, & Murphy, 2006).

Note that these differences in how minority views are treated in juries with unanimous versus nonunanimous decision rules are important even if the two types of juries end up making the same decisions (as they often will if the case is relatively straightforward). The mock jurors in the study by Hastie and colleagues (1983) later rated the quality of their deliberations, and those required to reach unanimity thought more highly of the thoroughness and seriousness of their discussions. Support for the legal system increases when all participants come away convinced that justice has been served—a sentiment that is much more likely when a unanimous opinion must be reached.

> “Justice delayed is justice denied.”
>
> —BRITISH PRIME MINISTER WILLIAM GLADSTONE

DAMAGE AWARDS Deciding the guilt or innocence of a defendant can sometimes be wrenchingly difficult, but at least there are only a few possible outcomes to consider—guilty versus not guilty, homicide versus manslaughter, and so on. In contrast, jurors in civil trials must often make decisions for which the response options are nearly boundless. For example, jurors must often decide how much a successful plaintiff should be paid in compensatory and punitive damages. How do jurors cope with such complexity, and how effective are they at awarding damages? Psychological research into these questions provides both encouraging and discouraging news (Kahneman, Schkade, & Sunstein, 1998; Sunstein et al., 2002).

A compensatory damage award can be straightforward; it represents the amount the plaintiff should receive to compensate for any loss or harm sustained. The compensatory damages jurors can award are often tightly constrained by economic analyses of the harm done. Punitive damage awards are more subjective; they are designed to deter the defendant and others from acting in a similarly negligent manner or with similar intent in the future, and jurors often have much more discretion in what to award. What amount should a clothing manufacturer pay a family for burns a child sustained because the child’ s pajamas were not sufficiently flame retardant? How much should a gas company pay if, in playing fast and loose with environmental laws, it contaminated local residents’ drinking water?

Research indicates that jurors go about making such decisions by first consulting their sense of outrage at the defendant’ s behavior. As **Figure A3.1** shows, this sense of outrage tends to be affected by how recklessly the defendant behaved and how much malice seemed to be involved in the defendant’ s actions (Kahneman et al., 1998). Jurors then translate their sense of outrage into punitive intent, which is also influenced by the amount of harm the plaintiff experienced and by the plaintiff’ s identity (harm to children or koalas is likely to inspire more punitive intent than similar harm to CEOs or hyenas). The difficulty lies in the next step: translating one’ s sense of punitive intent into an actual dollar figure. Should a defendant who you *feel strongly* should be punished pay more than a defendant who you *merely believe* should be punished?

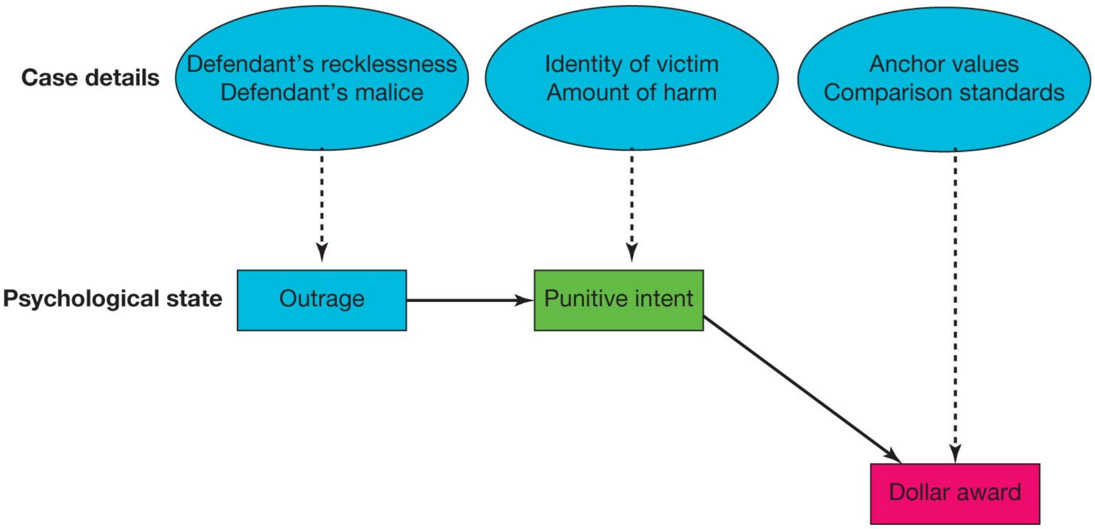

Case details
Defendant's recklessness
Defendant's malice
Identity of victim
Amount of harm
Anchor values
Comparison standards
Psychological state
Outrage
Punitive intent
Dollar award

FIGURE A3.1 **A MODEL OF THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PUNITIVE DAMAGE AWARDS** When making punitive damage awards, jurors first assess how outraged they are by the facts of the case. Then, considering who the victim is and the amount of harm suffered, they develop a sense of their intent to punish. The translation of punitive intent into a dollar award can be difficult and is often influenced by such extraneous variables as an available anchor value or a comparison standard that springs to mind. Source: Adapted from Kahneman et al., 1998.

The good news is that people tend to agree about how outraged they are over a defendant' s actions and about their desire to punish those actions. For instance, people generally agree that injuries to children merit more punishment than injuries to healthy retirees, that willful negligence calls for harsher treatment than simple carelessness, and that punishments that might deter the killing of dolphins or whales should be stiffer than those that might inhibit the killing of carp or mollusks.

The bad news is that the last step, translating punitive intent into an actual dollar amount, can be influenced by extraneous variables and therefore can be arbitrary. For example, various standards of comparison naturally evoked by a given case might introduce a degree of arbitrariness to the amount of a damage award. Suppose you hear about a company that allowed a toxic chemical to pollute the water supply of a small nursing home, leading to the early deaths of several residents. You would no doubt be outraged, but your outrage would likely be affected by comparing this incident with other cases of lethal pollution—cases involving larger communities and a wider range of victims, including very young children. Such comparisons might lead you to think that this case, though outrageous, is not as serious as some, and therefore the punitive damages should not be as high. In fact, research has shown that people can end up recommending stiffer penalties for harming appealing animals such as dolphins than for harming human beings (Kahneman et al., 1998; Sunstein et al., 2002). Converting our moral sentiments into dollars is a difficult translation that is prone to predictable biases.

In certain civil cases, an accessible anchor value, or a spontaneously invoked comparison, might influence the compensation awarded. In *Liebeck v. McDonald’s Restaurants* (1994), a famous case that inspired calls for reform in civil trials, the jury voted to award 79-year-old Stella Liebeck $2.7 million because she suffered third-degree burns after spilling a cup of McDonald’s coffee on her lap. The jury accepted Liebeck’s attorneys’ argument that McDonald’s coffee was too hot (and inadequately labeled as hot) and that McDonald’s should be penalized an amount equal to 1–2 days of its average revenue from the sale of coffee ($1.35 million per day). But what would the award have been if another reasonable figure had been cited instead, such as 1–2 days of McDonald’s *net profit* on coffee sales or the average person’s earnings during the period of Liebeck’s recuperation? A different anchor value would almost certainly have yielded a different result. (The judge reduced the jury’s recommended award to $480,000; Liebeck appealed that ruling and reached a settlement with McDonald’s for an undisclosed amount believed to be less than $600,000.)

Glossary

voir dire

The portion of a trial in U.S. courts in which the judge, the prosecuting attorney, and the defense attorney interview prospective jurors to determine their potential biases and ultimately select a jury.

scientific jury selection

A statistical approach to jury selection whereby jury selection specialists interview members of different demographic groups in the broader community about their attitudes toward various issues related to a trial, and defense and prosecuting attorneys try to influence the selection of jurors accordingly.

death-qualified jury

A jury from which prospective jurors who would never recommend the death penalty have been excluded.

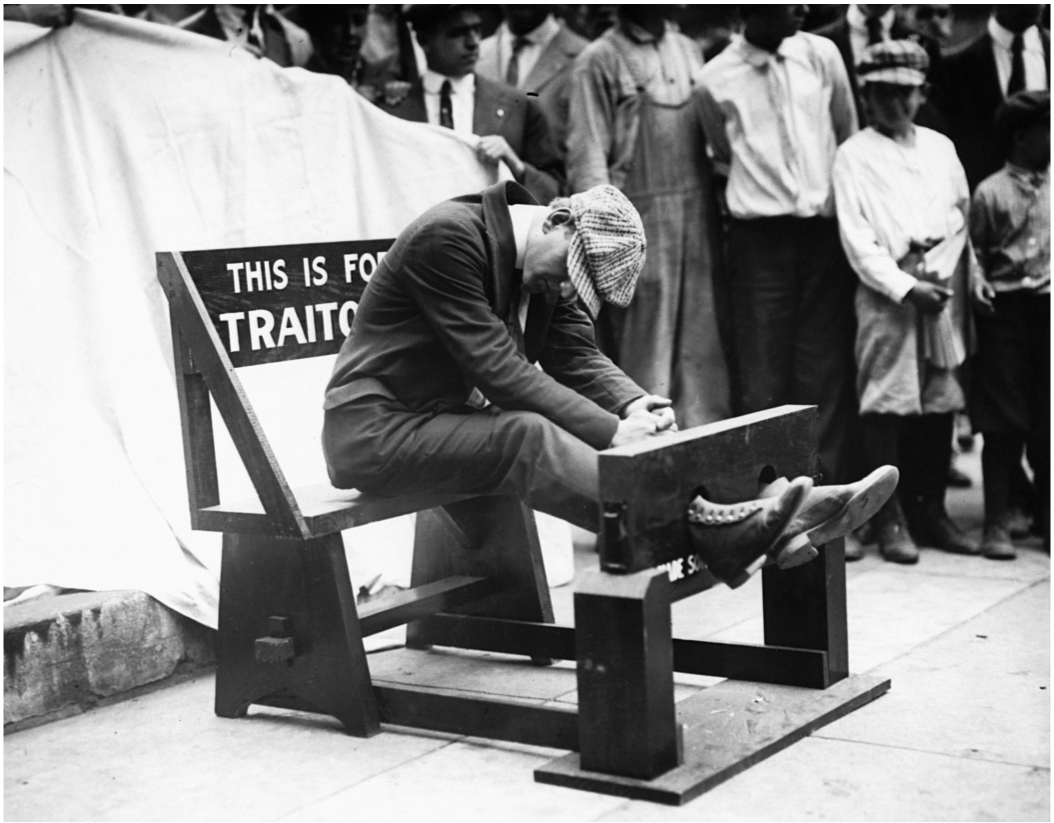
Punishment

Hunter-gatherer societies had no courts or juries, no judges or written laws, but individuals who transgressed tribal law—by stealing, cheating, or committing sexual infidelity, for example—were often subject to violent acts of revenge (C. Boehm, 1999). The Middle Ages and the Renaissance in Europe were times of spectacularly brutal forms of punishment, including regular beheadings, hangings, drawing and quartering, and whippings, often in town squares for all to see. Even minor transgressions were subject to extreme punishment. In parts of Europe, if a baker sold bread that weighed less than advertised, he would receive the equivalent of today’s waterboarding. In fifteenth-century Scotland, individuals who falsely posed as town fools were subject to having their ears nailed to a post or their fingers amputated.

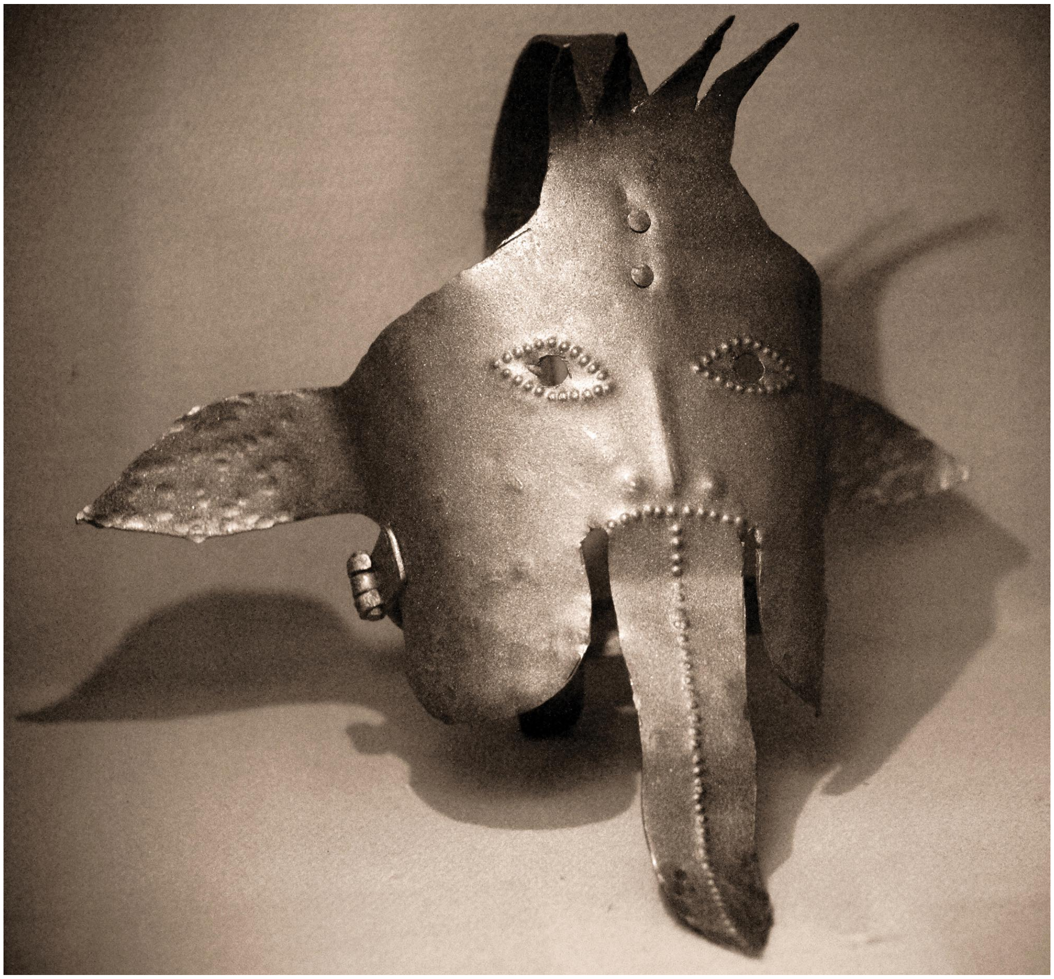
Today, punishment largely has been subsumed by the criminal justice system, which determines the guilt or innocence of an individual alleged to have committed a crime and what the penalty should be if that person is convicted. Within this system are people such as police officers, lawyers, judges, and jurors who make judgments about guilt or innocence and about appropriate punishments. Such judgments are the product of the human mind, and social psychologists have uncovered important underpinnings of people’s rationale for punishment—why we punish as we do and what makes punishments seem fair.

Motives and Kinds of Punishment: Just Deserts Versus Deterrence

Punishment is referred to as *retributive justice*—justice that requires people to make amends for harm and social transgressions. Within the realm of retributive justice, social psychologists differentiate between two motives that govern preferences for different kinds of punishment (Carlsmith, Darley, & Robinson, 2002; Weiner, Graham, & Reyna, 1997). One is the *just deserts* motive, commonly referred to as eye-for-an-eye justice; the goal is to avenge a prior evil deed rather than to prevent future ones. Such punishments are calibrated to the moral offensiveness of the crime. Empirical studies of U.S. college students find that their recommended punishments closely track their feelings of moral outrage; people prefer punishments that match the perceived severity of the harm caused by the alleged crime (Carlsmith & Darley, 2008).



(A)


(B)

JUST DESERTS PUNISHMENTS (A) In earlier times, people who were guilty of various crimes were subjected to public ridicule by being kept in stocks in public venues. (B) Several hundred years ago, people who committed various offenses, such as gossiping too much, might be forced to wear a “shame mask” like this one. These punishments were guided by just deserts—the requirement that the punishment match the crime.

A second motive that can guide punitive judgments is *deterrence*, the goal of which is to reduce the likelihood that the criminal or others will commit future crimes. People guided by the motive of deterrence assume that punishments change the cost-benefit analyses of people thinking about committing crimes. Punishment makes the costs of committing a crime (such as prison time or fines) more salient, which should outweigh any potential benefits, thereby deterring people from committing criminal acts in the future.

Punishments guided by the deterrence motive can take many forms. Incarceration (imprisonment) is an obvious way to prevent a convicted person from committing future crimes. More specific punishments practiced today, as well as those used in the past, reflect the deterrence motive. Lawyers who violate the law or their code of ethics are disbarred—prevented from practicing again. Priests are defrocked for immoral acts. Sex offenders have been castrated. In many countries in the past and present, thieves’ hands have been cut off. The underlying logic is that these more specific punishments prevent the perpetrator from committing similar crimes in the future.

An Attributional Account of Punishment

The just deserts and deterrence motives are useful for understanding people’s rationale for punishment, and these motives may be at play in the pronounced variation in punishments handed out across different cultures. In Japan and Norway, for example, prisons are much more open, and prisoners are integrated more readily into the nearby community. This approach to punishment appears to be guided by a deterrence-based practice of rehabilitation. The United States, by contrast, has much more severe sentencing practices, which might be attributable to the greater influence of the just deserts motive (although it could readily be argued that severe sentences serve to deter criminals as well). What might account for such cultural variations and, more generally, for preferences for just deserts versus deterrence-oriented punishments?

(A)

(B)

INCARCERATION ACROSS CULTURES (A) In the United States, prison sentences tend to be longer than they are in other developed countries, and the prisons themselves more aggressively segregate prisoners from the rest of the population. (B) In many other countries, such as Norway and Japan, prisoners are more readily integrated into local communities.

Bernard Weiner and his colleagues (1997) have offered one answer to this question. Their theory draws on the idea that emotion-based intuitions drive different punitive judgments. According to their account, two attributions lead people to feel anger about a criminal act: (1) the belief that the perpetrator is responsible for the crime and intended it to happen and (2) the belief that the crime reflects a stable part of the perpetrator’s character. Numerous studies find that once angered, people prefer just deserts forms of punishment—they want the perpetrator to suffer in proportion to the harm caused (J. S. Lerner, Goldberg, & Tetlock, 1998).

A different set of attributions leads people to feel sympathy rather than anger toward the perpetrator of a criminal act. Specifically, people tend to feel sympathy when they believe (1) that situational factors, including the perpetrator’s past history (such as being a victim of abuse), led to the crime and (2) that the crime does not reflect a stable part of the perpetrator’s character. These two attributions reduce the inclination to see the perpetrator suffer in proportion to the harm caused (Rudolph et al., 2004). Feeling sympathy also increases forgiveness and makes people prefer punishments that protect the criminal and society, such as forms of rehabilitation (Weiner et al., 1997).

Weiner and his colleagues have tested this framework in studies of teachers’ attitudes toward punishing students for breaking rules and U.S. citizens’ attitudes toward punishing O. J. Simpson when he was on trial for murdering his ex-wife. The findings are in keeping with their analysis: Attributions give rise to feelings of anger or sympathy, and these emotions lead to different punitive judgments. These principles play out in the legal strategies typically pursued by the prosecution (focusing on the responsibility and poor character of the defendant) and the defense (focusing on the role of circumstance), and they apply in debates about the relevance of evidence about a defendant’s life history (Toobin, 2011). Many perpetrators of violent acts have suffered profound physical abuse as children, and increasingly this evidence is being considered in trials, particularly in death penalty cases. This kind of information, if allowed at trial, is likely to generate more sympathy for defendants and therefore more lenient punitive judgments.

Bias in the Criminal Justice System

As we write this, roughly two million Americans are in prison, more people than in any country but Russia. And on a per capita basis, the United States leads the world in incarceration (The Sentencing Project, n.d.). Social scientists have long grappled with a disturbing fact: Black and Latino men are represented in higher numbers in U.S. prisons than in the general population. Might this overrepresentation be due in part to bias in the justice system—that is, to people’s stereotypes and prejudices about Blacks and Latinos?

Social psychologists Jennifer Eberhardt, Phoebe Ellsworth, and Jack Glaser argue that stereotype-based decision making is at least partly responsible for observed biases in the criminal justice system (Eberhardt et al., 2006; Glaser, 2014; Sommers & Ellsworth, 2009). Their reasoning is that cultural stereotypes of Blacks and Latinos hold that they are more dangerous, more prone to violence, and more likely to use drugs. These stereotypes then guide the many decisions people in the criminal justice system make, thus giving rise to race-related biases in who is convicted and punished for different crimes (Plant & Peruche, 2005). Stereotypes, for example, influence which people police officers pull over and whether they search for drugs or write a ticket for an offense. For similar reasons, stereotypes may shape how jurors assign responsibility for crimes, the degree to which they feel anger or sympathy, the likelihood of conviction, and sentencing length.

Evidence in support of a stereotype-based account of bias in the criminal justice system has been mounting for some time now (for a summary, see Glaser, 2014). For example, the Supreme Court gives police officers ample latitude in terms of who they can pull over and search without probable cause. The Bureau of Justice Statistics indicates that Black and Latino drivers are 3 times more likely to be searched when pulled over, even though these searches are not likely to yield incriminating evidence (Durose, Smith, & Langan, 2007; Plant & Peruche, 2005). Once on trial, Black and Latino defendants may not receive treatment equal to that given others; mock jurors are more likely to convict a Black defendant than a White defendant in a hypothetical trial for the same crime (Sommers & Ellsworth, 2001). Outside the laboratory, a summary of sentences meted out to 77,000 offenders found that Blacks were given longer sentences than Whites for similar crimes (Mustard, 2001). A subsequent Bureau of Justice Statistics investigation found that Black men received sentences 5–10 percent longer than White men did for similar crimes (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015). Collectively, these findings suggest that racial stereotypes may partly explain racial biases in conviction rates and severity of sentencing (see Chapter 11 for a fuller discussion of this issue).

Perceptions of Fairness of the Criminal Justice System

Theoretically, laws and punishments should instill a sense of order in society. In practice, the U.S. criminal justice system and the influence of its laws and punishments depend critically on another type of justice social psychologists have studied—procedural justice, which refers to whether the processes resulting in the administration of rewards and punishments are perceived to be fair (Tyler, 2006). Procedural justice depends on *how* rewards and punishments are determined: It is salient, for example, when considering whether employers use the same criteria to give bonuses to different employees, which criteria to use for admitting students to colleges and universities, and whether the likelihood of arrest and the length of prison sentences depend on the race or social class of the individual accused of a crime.

Three factors shape a person’s sense of procedural justice, according to social psychologist Tom Tyler (1994). The first involves assessments of the *neutrality* of the authority figure. When figure-skating judges give substantially higher scores to skaters from their own country, their neutrality is clearly in question, and the sense of procedural justice is undermined. With respect to punishment, a citizen’s sense of procedural justice will depend critically on whether the citizen sees the legal system as evenhanded. Second, there must be *trust* in the system. The individual must have confidence that authority figures—police officers, lawyers, judges—will treat everyone fairly according to consistent principles and standards. Third, the individual must feel that everyone is treated with *respect*. Do authority figures meting out justice—police officers giving out traffic tickets or judges delivering sentences, for example—treat those they are punishing politely? Respect on the part of authority figures, Tyler reasons, gives people a sense that the legal system is fair.

Tyler contends that these three facets of procedural justice have as much influence on the sense that outcomes are fair as does the actual content, good or bad, of the outcomes themselves (Tyler, 1994). In survey research, Tyler and colleagues contacted people who had recent experiences with authority figures. In one study, participants had recently been punished for crimes they had committed, and they indicated what punishment they received, such as the length of their prison sentence (Tyler, 1987). Participants also indicated the extent to which they thought the authority figure had been neutral and trustworthy and had treated them with respect. The dependent measure of interest was each participant’s feelings about the authority figure’s fairness.

Two findings stand out. First, the magnitude of the punishment participants received was not correlated with their sense of procedural justice. This is an important finding because it suggests that people separate how the punishment is delivered from the punishment itself. Second, and perhaps more striking, their ratings of neutrality, trust, and respect were stronger determinants of their belief in the fairness of the criminal justice system than the actual punishment they received. People’s sense of justice thus revolves around more than personal gains or losses.

On the one hand, we might be encouraged by Tyler’s findings. A society can build a sense of justice in groups and communities by ensuring that the distribution of rewards and punishments is neutral, respectful, and carried out by people who can be trusted—and it can do so without changing the allocation of material resources. On the other hand, a more sinister implication of Tyler’s findings is that authority figures might be responsible for all sorts of pernicious outcomes, from job layoffs to unwarranted prison sentences, without encountering protest, as long as they deliver them in a neutral, respectful, and trustworthy fashion.

Glossary

procedural justice
: Assessments of whether the processes leading to legal outcomes are fair.

Module Review

SUMMARY

Before a Case Goes to Trial

- Eyewitness testimony can be unreliable; even when trying their best to tell the truth, eyewitnesses can be mistaken when trying to identify perpetrators.
- Most people’s guesses about the factors that influence witness accuracy can be wide of the mark. Because police investigators and jurors can’t always assess witness accuracy, judicial procedures have recently been developed to minimize the likelihood of conviction due to mistaken identification.
- Suspects’ confessions are sometimes false, even when coercion is not great; as a result, certain jurisdictions require the filming of all interrogations. Jurors are poor judges of whether confessions are false or not.

Inside the Courtroom

- Jury selection begins with the process of *voir dire*, when the judge and the prosecuting and defense attorneys try to determine whether prospective jurors are impartial.
- Using *scientific jury selection*, attorneys accept or reject prospective jurors on the basis of demographic and statistical data.
- Whether only those jurors who would sentence a criminal to death should serve in capital cases is a controversial issue. *Death-qualified juries* are more likely to convict than those in which some jurors have reservations about the death penalty.

- When a minority of jurors dissents from the proposed verdict, the initial majority verdict usually prevails. While juries smaller than 12 people are allowed in some jurisdictions, larger juries are more likely to consider the opinions of a minority of jurors. When verdicts do not need to be unanimous, juries spend less time deliberating after the necessary majority is reached.
- Compensatory damage awards are intended to make up for any loss the plaintiff has suffered; punitive damage awards are intended to deter the defendant and others from acting similarly in the future. Compensatory damages are often straightforward, but punitive damages can be highly subjective and based on arbitrary comparisons and anchor values.

Punishment

- Two motives that guide punishment are the just deserts motive, intended to avenge a crime, and deterrence, intended to prevent the crime from happening again.
- Certain attributions and emotions lead to preferred forms of punishment. Believing that a criminal has acted willfully and is responsible for the crime leads to feelings of anger and a preference for just deserts forms of punishment. Believing that situational factors led, in large part, to the criminal act leads to sympathy and a preference for more deterrence-oriented punishment.
- Social psychological research has yielded evidence of racial bias in the U.S. criminal justice system. Stereotypes about Blacks and Latinos being more likely to commit crimes may increase the likelihood that people in those groups will be investigated, convicted, and punished.

Perceptions of Fairness of the Criminal Justice System

- *Procedural justice* refers to people’s assessments of whether the processes that result in the distribution of rewards and punishments are fair. If people feel the system is neutral and trustworthy and that they have been treated with respect, they are more likely to believe that outcomes are fair, regardless of the magnitude of the punishment or reward.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Suppose your laptop is stolen from your dorm room one night, and a few of your neighbors catch a glimpse of a suspect as they are arriving home from a party. Your residence hall advisor (RA) brings in your neighbors individually to ask them about the suspect they saw. How should your RA’s questions be posed to get the most accurate eyewitness testimony possible?
2. If you are in charge of establishing rules for jury deliberation, what can you do to increase the likelihood that minority opinions will be adequately considered? What research findings would you cite to back up your decisions?
3. Maria and Tanya are on the jury in a civil court case that has found the defendant guilty. They must now decide how the defendant should be punished. During their deliberations, it becomes clear that Maria is angered by the defendant’s behavior, while Tanya feels sympathy. Using what you learned in this module, describe the differing attributions that might have led to Maria’s anger compared with Tanya’s sympathy. Which kind of punishment do you think each is likely to prefer?
4. Thais and Elisa both get speeding tickets and are being punished by their parents. Thais’s parents have a system of rules they follow for punishing all their children, and they calmly but firmly explain to Thais that she will

be grounded for a month. Elisa’ s parents, in contrast, favor her brothers over her, punish their children inconsistently from week to week, and scream at Elisa for her mistake—but only ground her for a week. Who is likely to feel her punishment is more just, and why: Thais, with her longer sentence, or Elisa, with her shorter sentence?

The answer guidelines for the Think About It questions can be found at the back of the book . . .

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ANSWER GUIDELINES FOR THINK ABOUT IT QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 1

1. What does the Milgram experiment on obedience demonstrate about the power of the situation? What features of the experimental situation might have increased the likelihood that participants would continue to shock the learner even after the learner showed signs of pain?

ANSWER: The Milgram experiment demonstrated that, given the right situational factors, a majority of psychologically healthy adults were willing to continue shocking an innocent man even after he screamed and complained of a heart condition. Most of these participants were clearly not sadists but rather were influenced by a powerful situation, which included the experimenter’s insistence that they continue with the shocks, the intimidating setting (a prestigious university), and perhaps even the lack of a clear schema for how to politely discontinue participation.

2. Why are schemas so important for social interaction? What is your schema for being a student in a classroom? What might happen if you didn’t have that schema?

ANSWER: To understand and navigate even the most seemingly simple social situations, like ordering food at a restaurant, we rely on complex systems of organized knowledge called schemas. A schema for being a student might consist of the expectation that a teacher will lead the class and that students should sit quietly in their seats, take notes, observe the teacher, and speak only when called upon. Without this schema, a confusing, embarrassing situation might ensue.

3. When trying to understand people’s thoughts, feelings, and motivations, why don’t researchers just ask them? What does research on automatic versus controlled processing tell us about people’s awareness of their own mental states?

ANSWER: People tend to believe they have more conscious access to their mental processes than they really do. Research has shown that most mental processing happens nonconsciously—that is, outside of conscious awareness or control. For this reason, people’ s self-reports of their beliefs and motivations are not always accurate. Social psychology experiments can be designed in ways that tap into nonconscious processes. For example, one study showed that European American participants who were reminded of African Americans and then asked to read a brief description of someone whose race was not specified were more likely to rate that individual as more hostile, suggesting that they might implicitly associate African Americans with hostility (Devine, 1989b). This was true even for participants who did not openly express negative attitudes toward African Americans in a questionnaire.

4. How does evolution help explain social behavior? What are some types of behaviors that seem most likely to be explained by evolution, and what behaviors seem less likely?

ANSWER: Evolution operates through natural selection, the process whereby animals and plants that possess adaptive traits are more likely to survive and reproduce and therefore pass on the genes that code for those traits to future generations. Many of the adaptive traits that humans almost universally possess, such as the capacity for language and the ability to form affectionate bonds, may have been shaped by natural selection. Traits that vary across cultures and individuals, such as valuing individual accomplishments over group accomplishments, are less likely to be explained by evolutionary theory.

5. What is the naturalistic fallacy, and why is it so important to avoid when considering evolutionary explanations?

ANSWER: The naturalistic fallacy refers to the erroneous claim that the way things are is the way they should be. Evolutionary theory as applied to human behavior is controversial in part because people have at times used evolutionary explanations to justify gender and racial inequality or to promote fascist ideology. The naturalistic fallacy can also lead people to believe that biology is destiny and that there is little they can do to control their behavior. These beliefs are both destructive and inaccurate. Much of human civilization is based on the continual regulation and modification of biological predispositions through medical interventions, education, and law enforcement.

6. How do Western and Eastern countries differ in their beliefs about the role of the self in relation to the group? How might these beliefs lead to different behaviors in an academic setting?

ANSWER: Research suggests that, on average, individuals in independent cultures, such as those of the United States and Great Britain, tend to focus more on their own personal unique traits and accomplishments, whereas individuals in interdependent cultures, such as those of China and Korea, tend to focus more on their role within a group and their obligation to that group. In an academic setting, members of a more independent culture might be more likely to strive to stand out among their classmates, whereas members of a more interdependent culture may strive to blend in harmoniously with their peers.

7. Are evolutionary and cultural explanations for behavior compatible, or do they conflict?

ANSWER: Evolutionary and cultural explanations for behavior are generally not mutually exclusive; they work together to provide a more complete picture. Evolution has provided humans with a broad array of tools and propensities that can be either cultivated through cultural practices or set aside if they are not useful in a given ecological or economic context. For example, although evolutionary forces may predispose women to prefer mates who have ample resources to support a family, in countries where women have greater financial resources themselves, this preference may no longer be as relevant, and mate preferences may shift.

CHAPTER 2

1. After reading this chapter, do you think it’s important for students of social psychology to have a basic understanding of research methods? Why or why not?

ANSWER: Although this question asks for your opinion, it’s essential for students of social psychology to have a basic understanding of research methods. This knowledge contributes to your ability both to understand social psychology research (and many other kinds of empirical research) and to think critically about the science involved. For example, without understanding that correlational research does not provide causal information, you might easily believe that certain claims have a causal connection and therefore act on them. Consider parents of overweight children who read that attempts to control their diet will *cause* them to be overweight. If parents new to research methods accepted this finding as fact, it might seem reasonable for them to be overly permissive toward their child’s eating habits, with potentially harmful consequences.

2. Recall from Chapter 1 the experiment on nonconscious processing in which participants read a persuasive message in a room with either a fishy smell, an unpleasant smell that was not fishy, or no distinctive smell (S. W. S. Lee & Schwarz, 2012). The researchers measured the degree to which each participant was persuaded by the message and discovered that participants were least likely to be persuaded in the presence of a fishy smell (there was something “fishy” about the message). In this experiment, what was the independent variable? What was the dependent variable?

ANSWER: The independent variable is the variable the researcher manipulates—the hypothesized “cause.” In this experiment, it was the smell participants were exposed to, and it had three levels: a fishy smell, an unpleasant smell that was not fishy, and no distinctive smell. The dependent variable is what the researcher measures—the hypothesized “effect.” In this experiment, it was the degree to which the message persuaded the participants.

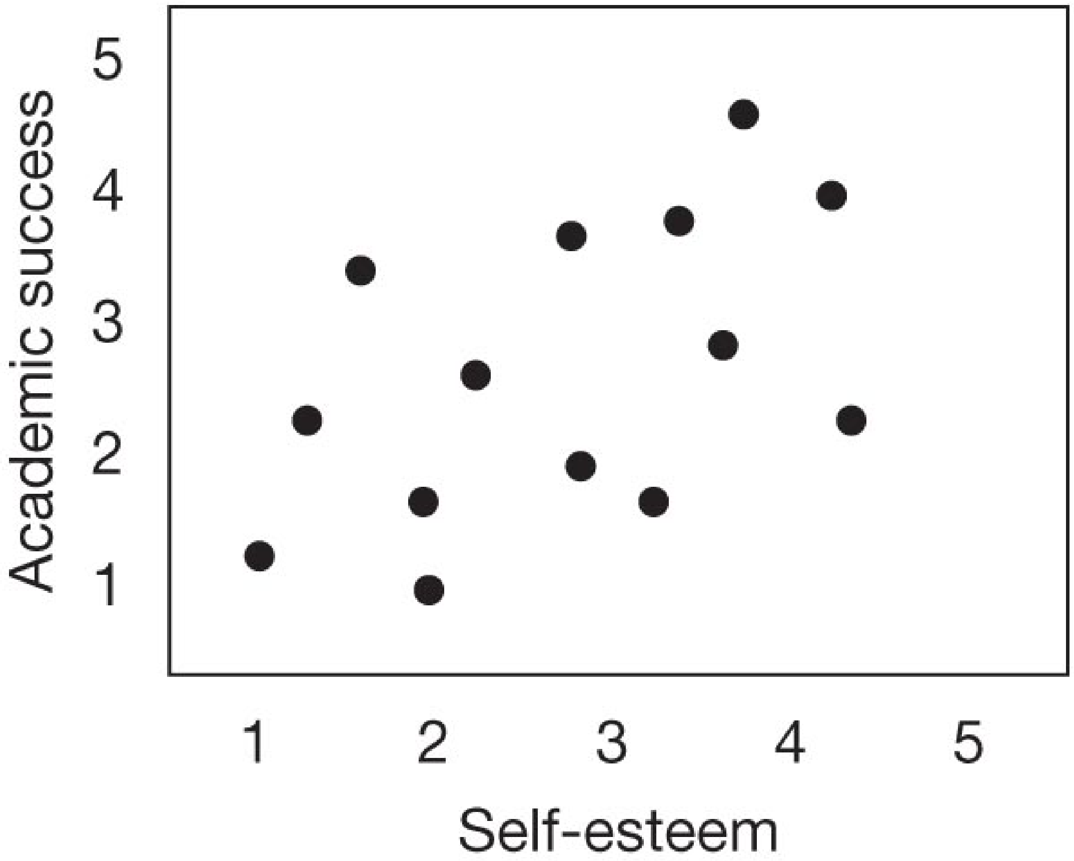
3. Suppose a group of researchers hypothesized that finding your romantic partner to be highly physically attractive predicts high degrees of satisfaction in your relationship. To evaluate this hypothesis, the researchers asked 100 participants to complete a survey that included questions about their current relationship satisfaction as well as ratings of how physically attractive they believed their partner to be. The researchers found that the more physically attractive participants rated their partners, the more satisfied they tended to be in their relationship. In this fictitious study, did the researchers employ a correlational or an experimental design? How do you know?

ANSWER: This study is correlational. The researchers evaluated whether a relationship exists between two naturally occurring variables: relationship satisfaction and perceived partner attractiveness. The researchers did not randomly assign participants to levels of the independent variable, so the study cannot be considered an experiment.

4. Consider the hypothetical study in question 3 again. The researchers found a relationship between perceptions of partner physical attractiveness and relationship satisfaction. With these data, can the researchers conclude that perceiving your partner as physically attractive causes you to be more satisfied in your relationship? Are there other potential explanations for these findings?

ANSWER: With these data, the researchers cannot determine a causal relationship between the two variables. For example, perceiving your partner as attractive may cause you to be more satisfied. It is also possible, however, that being in a satisfying relationship causes you to be more attracted to your partner. Perhaps a third variable, such as being a cheerful, optimistic person, causes you to be satisfied in your relationship and causes you to see your partner as attractive (the third-variable problem). To rule out these possibilities, the researchers would have to conduct an experiment.

5. In Chapter 3, you will learn about research on the self, including self-esteem. Suppose the scatterplot below displays the relationship between self-esteem and academic success. How might you interpret this graph? Is the correlation between these two variables positive or negative? Try guessing the correlation coefficient.



ANSWER: The graph shows that as self-esteem increases, so does academic success. This is a positive correlation. To know the correlation exactly, we would have to evaluate these results with mathematical formulas. It would be reasonable to guess, however, that the correlation is between .30 and .50.

6. In this textbook, you will learn about various studies evaluating social psychological phenomena using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), which measures activation in the brain while the participant lies immobile in a large metal tube. For example, researchers may measure brain activation while participants experience a social rejection or may look at how brain activation during a stressful experience is affected if a close friend holds the participant’s hand. How would you characterize the external validity of such research?

ANSWER: Research using fMRI involves an unusual environment, one unlike any other a participant will experience in everyday life. For that reason, external validity is somewhat low. Unfortunately, questions about the connection between social experiences and reactivity in the brain cannot be answered by field research alone. Nevertheless, a thoughtful researcher can still set up a convincing psychological experience in a scanner. Is a perceived rejection any less real when experienced in the bore of the magnet? Social support from a friend may be particularly valuable in this stressful environment. (Think of a person being comforted by a spouse while undergoing an unusual or frightening medical procedure, not as part of an experiment, but during an actual course of treatment.) Moreover, consensus across studies lends additional support to the conclusion that a set of brain regions is involved under particular social psychological circumstances.

CHAPTER 3

1. According to research on the accuracy of self-knowledge, for what qualities are we the best judges of ourselves? For what qualities are others superior judges of us? How does motivation contribute to this asymmetry?

ANSWER: Although people predict that they are the best judges of themselves, when it comes to predicting behavior, others know us about as well as we know ourselves. However, we are superior judges of ourselves when it comes to private, inner qualities that are not easily observable (like our inner thoughts and feelings). Others are superior judges of us when it comes to qualities that are readily displayed in social settings (like our level of talkativeness and enthusiasm). Motivation contributes to the self/other knowledge asymmetry regarding qualities that have a positive or negative connotation. We are strongly motivated to see ourselves favorably, which may give us blind spots about our socially undesirable shortcomings. In these cases, others tend to know us more accurately than we know ourselves. (And thank goodness; you wouldn’t want to be fully aware of your every flaw!)

2. How might an undergraduate woman’s working self-concept regarding her gender shift during a day on campus as she attends her advanced math class (in which she is the only woman), has a low-key lunch with a friend, and attends her gender studies class? Will her frequently shifting self-concept undermine her sense of having a coherent self?

ANSWER: The working self-concept shifts with situational cues such that in a given situation, especially relevant and/or distinctive self-aspects become part of the working self-concept. In her advanced math class, this young woman’s gender identity is highly *distinctive* (as she is the only woman), and in her gender studies class, her gender identity is highly *relevant* to the situation (discussing gender theory). Thus, both class contexts should highlight her gender identity in her working self-concept. During lunch, however, it’ s unlikely that gender will be part of her working self-concept, being neither particularly relevant nor distinctive in that context. Despite these shifts in her working self-concept, she is probably not confused about her identity; she probably has a core set of self-aspects that define who she is regardless of her current working self-concept. Moreover, she is probably used to these fluctuations during her days on campus, since they form a stable pattern of activation and deactivation of her gender in her working self-concept (making her feel especially like a woman in her math and gender studies classes and less so at other times).

3. How do people’ s daily experiences in their contingent versus noncontingent domains affect their state self-esteem? Over time, how might these experiences translate to trait self-esteem?

ANSWER: Performing well in a contingent domain boosts state self-esteem, whereas performing poorly in a contingent domain diminishes state self-esteem. Performance in noncontingent domains has less influence on state self-esteem. Over time, accumulating experiences of good versus poor performance may influence trait self-esteem. Repeatedly performing poorly in contingent domains (threatening state self-esteem frequently) may ultimately reduce overall trait self-esteem. Similarly, regularly performing well in contingent domains (boosting state self-esteem repeatedly) may ultimately increase overall trait self-esteem. Performance over time in noncontingent domains is unlikely to affect trait self-esteem.

4. Do people from Eastern cultures generally feel worse about themselves than people from Western cultures do? How do researchers interpret self-reported self-esteem differences between cultures?

ANSWER: Members of Eastern cultures tend to report lower feelings of self-esteem than members of Western cultures; however, rather than reflecting an overall more negative view of the self, this difference may reflect differing cultural value systems. In East Asian and other non-Western cultures, views of the self are more interwoven with the social context. Accordingly, these cultures prioritize improving the self (perhaps to better fulfill one’ s obligations and duties in social relationships and systems) and meeting the goals of the group, rather than meeting the goal of being a self-confident and powerful individual (which Western cultures tend to prioritize). Thus, it may not be accurate to conclude that members of Eastern cultures feel worse about themselves than Westerners; they simply feel different about the self as a whole.

5. Should people be more likely to display the better-than-average effect for their own intelligence before or after learning how intelligence is measured in scientific research? How do construals contribute to this process?

ANSWER: According to research on self-serving construals, the better-than-average effect is more prevalent for qualities with ambiguous, or fuzzy, definitions but dissipates in strength when objective standards become apparent. Thus, before obtaining a clear definition of intelligence, people may be more prone to self-enhance with respect to their intelligence in order to bolster their self-worth. Under these conditions of ambiguity, people may construe different qualities as being more or less important to intelligence, construing their own strengths (perhaps artistic or interpersonal skill) as key to intelligence and construing their weaknesses as less relevant to intelligence. However, once people learn the scientific standards for intelligence, their tendency to display the better-than-average effect should decrease because the standards reduce their freedom to construe their own best qualities as core to intelligence.

6. If you’re fairly sure you are scatterbrained, but a friend tells you that you’re organized and focused, what will your cognitive reaction likely be? What will your emotional reaction likely be? Which motive—self-enhancement or self-verification—drives which set of reactions?

ANSWER: Self-verification, the need to be seen accurately by others for important self-defining traits, should drive your cognitive reactions to this feedback, making you dubious about the quality of the feedback your friend has provided. In contrast, your emotional system, ruled more by self-enhancement, should register this as positive feedback and lead you to feel good about this feedback, even as your cognitive mind tells you it is inaccurate. Thus, you may think your friend is off base in her compliment to you (perhaps making you question her competence as a judge of you), but you will still feel emotionally better about it than if she had confirmed your negative self-view of being scatterbrained.

7. Suppose two friends both have an actual self that is relatively happy and a potential self that is extremely happy (happier than their actual self). If this discrepancy in happiness leads one friend to experience agitation and the other friend to experience dejection, what does this tell you? What theory would this evidence support?

ANSWER: Actual selves that are discrepant with ought selves produce agitation, whereas actual selves discrepant with ideal selves produce dejection. This suggests that for the agitated friend, the extremely happy potential self is an ought self, whereas for the dejected friend, the extremely happy potential self is an ideal self. In other words, the first friend feels that she really *should* be happier, whereas the second friend feels she would like to ideally be happier (but it’s not a matter of “should”). This pattern of emotional responses would support self-discrepancy theory.

CHAPTER 4

1. How valid are snap judgments? Do brief exposures to a person’s physical appearance or to “thin slices” of the individual’s behavior provide meaningful information about what that person is really like?

ANSWER: Snap judgments often contain a kernel of truth, but not the whole truth, about a person. Research described in this chapter showed that snap judgments of political candidates’ competence based on a brief look at candidate photos were predictive of electoral success, suggesting that these judgments corresponded with the general consensus about the candidates based on larger samples of their behavior over time. There is no clear evidence, however, that snap judgments of competence reliably predict *actual* competence, and the same is true for judgments of most other traits. Therefore, it is best to avoid making important decisions solely on the basis of snap judgments.

2. If you were developing an advertising campaign for a fitness class, what kinds of framing strategies might you use to increase the chances of people signing up for the class? In particular, consider spin framing, positive and negative framing, and temporal framing.

ANSWER: An example of spin framing could be to highlight the low cost of the class: Your monthly membership costs less than you spend on coffee each month. An example of positive framing could be to describe the benefits of the class for participants’ physical appearance: “Get beach-ready!” An example of negative framing (which generally has greater impact) could be to describe the potential health risks of not exercising: “Inactive people are nearly twice as likely to develop heart disease.” An example of temporal framing could be to encourage people to sign up well in advance (“Lock in a deal on next year’s gym membership now at the incredibly low price of…”), before they have a chance to construe the class in potentially less pleasant, concrete terms (of sweating, exhaustion, and so on).

3. Suppose you’re about to go on a blind date when a mutual friend warns you that your date can be a little cold and unfriendly. According to research on the confirmation bias, how might this information influence the impression you ultimately form about your date?

ANSWER: If you expect your date to be cold and unfriendly, you might be more likely to pick up on behaviors that confirm your expectations; for example, you might notice that your date is short with the waiter. You might also be more likely to ask leading questions that elicit information consistent with your expectations. For example, if your date is a professor, you might ask, “So, do your students drive you crazy?” As a result of your biased observations and behavior toward your date, your date may indeed reveal more cold and unfriendly characteristics, and you may consequently form a more negative impression that confirms your initial expectations.

4. Research on priming suggests that it is possible for a stimulus to activate a schema even if a person is not consciously aware of the stimulus. Can you think of ways that you might be able to use priming to influence others’ behavior?

ANSWER: To increase creativity, you could have people work in a green or blue environment. To make someone more attracted to you, you could wear red or put a red border around a photo of yourself. To make people behave more honestly, you could put up a poster of something or someone with eyes, which makes people feel like they are being watched. To make people more concerned about preventing climate change, you could make your case about it in an especially hot room.

5. Can you think of a time when you committed the fundamental attribution error? What happened? Why do you think you made this mistake?

ANSWER: We are all likely to commit the fundamental attribution error, and we all probably do so regularly. For example, consider when a friend’s new girlfriend comes out with the gang for the first time. If she is quiet and awkward, it’s easy to assume she is an introverted person, thereby attributing her behavior to her disposition. But being the odd person out in a group of close friends will make almost anyone feel a bit shy, right? Why don’t we take this into account? The fundamental attribution error occurs for many reasons. For one thing, a person’s behavior is often more salient or obvious to us than the situational circumstances. We’re more likely to notice the new girlfriend’s awkward behavior than to be aware of the situation and how it will impact her (particularly because the situation is very different for us—comfortable and familiar). In addition, we know that it’s easier to make dispositional attributions; considering the situation takes more energy or effort. We can be lazy, so often the thoughtless dispositional attribution wins out.

6. Imagine you are single and decide to go to a speed-dating event during which you will have a series of 5-minute dates with many people. You really care about getting to know what your dates are like. Given this situation, which types of behaviors would strongly signal the type of person each date is? What types of behaviors might you discount—that is, chalk up to the demands of the speed-dating situation?

ANSWER: The situational demands in a speed-dating event are strong. For example, in this situation, it’s socially appropriate to act friendly, outgoing, and lighthearted. Therefore, if one of your dates acted friendly, outgoing, and lighthearted, it would be hard to tell whether she was truly that kind of person or whether she was acting that way because the situation calls for such traits. This demonstrates the discounting principle—the idea that we should assign less weight to a cause of a behavior (your date’ s personality) if there are other possible causes that might have produced the behavior (the demands of the speed-dating situation). In contrast, acting rude, introverted, or serious goes against the demands of the speed-dating situation. In this way, if one of your dates acted rude, introverted, or serious, it would strongly signal that this is the type of person your date is.

7. In what ways do the stories that are reported most frequently affect people’ s judgments about various risks they face in the world?

ANSWER: The media tend to overreport negative, violent, and sensational events because these types of stories attract viewers’ attention more than positive, altruistic, and everyday events do. Research shows that 80 percent of the crime reported in the media is violent, whereas in reality only 20 percent of crime is violent. Unfortunately, this bias can lead people to view the world as more dangerous than it is, especially if they live in an area where crime is more prevalent. This bad-news bias can also prevent people from learning about inspiring, altruistic acts, such as relief efforts to help victims of natural disasters and ordinary citizens helping their neighbors through hard times.

8. Imagine that your friends are working together on a task. You ask each person to report what percentage of the work they were responsible for and then add up the individual percentages. Would you expect the percentages to add to roughly 100 percent? Why or why not?

ANSWER: The sum of estimates would likely be above 100 percent due to the availability heuristic, a mental shortcut that leads people to overestimate their own contributions to joint efforts and to underestimate others’ contributions.

Examples of your own hard work are more available to you because you experience them firsthand, whereas examples of others’ hard work may be harder to bring to mind, making them seem less frequent or substantial. Research indicates that people tend to overestimate their own contributions even when these contributions are negative (like starting arguments), suggesting that this phenomenon is not explained simply by a motivational bias to present oneself in a favorable light.

CHAPTER 5

1. Imagine a friend tells you that the human species would be better off without our capacity for emotion. How would you counter this claim? What ideas and evidence across this chapter would you reference to make the case for emotions?

ANSWER: Emotions help people adapt to social challenges and opportunities in many ways. Specific emotions guide cognition in efficient ways to focus on what is important to your goals. Specific emotions guide actions within interactions that serve personal goals. Emotions help us form and maintain the social relationships that matter most to us. For this reason, a healthy balance of positive emotions and an ability to regulate our negative emotions with reappraisal and acceptance lead to greater health, happiness, sense of connection, creativity, and productivity.

2. Humans appear to have a coordinated display of embarrassment that resembles appeasement signals in other species. What does this tell us about the function of embarrassment? Why do you feel embarrassed when you trip and fall in a full lecture hall? What effects should your display of embarrassment have on your classmates?

ANSWER: Emotions have myriad social functions, and embarrassment has a particularly interesting role in human relationships, signaling remorse for making social errors (like breaking norms or violating role constraints). Expressing embarrassment tells others in your social network that you’re aware you committed a social transgression, recognize you may deserve punishment, and wish to be forgiven. Thus, when you trip and fall in lecture, you have violated an implicit social norm (not to trip and fall but rather to be dignified and composed) and may in turn show a strong blush response and embarrassment display. These automatic signals communicate to your classmates that you know you’ve blundered and should make them see you as more trustworthy and upstanding, if not especially graceful.

3. Much communication today occurs via electronic text rather than face-to-face, whether in an online chat or text message, an email, or a post on a social media site. Given what you know about the importance of emotions for social relationships, why do you think people frequently use emoticons and emojis in these communications? What social functions do they perform?

ANSWER: Emotion plays an important role in coordinating interactions, communicating our commitments and true feelings, and understanding what others are thinking and feeling. Emoticons and emojis can help us express and signal emotions in the online world, adding a layer of social color and richness to our digital interactions. A smiley face, an uncertain face, a shocked face, or a face of relief can add emotional overtones to otherwise sterile textual conversations, helping us communicate our true intent and understand the nuances of others’ statements. Perhaps they even provide social rewards for our conversation partners, and in group texts and conversations, perhaps they help us find and fill our social niche. Although emoticons cannot substitute for the rich language of touch, facial expressions, and vocal expressions associated with emotions, they may help make up for some of what is lost in a digital context.

4. Suppose you just got into a huge fight with your parents on the phone and are feeling angry. You call up your romantic partner to talk about the fight, but you just end up fighting with your partner. Using what you know about emotion’s effects on perception, how would you explain this second fight?

ANSWER: Anger makes us more attuned to signals of threat in the environment, making us see more hostile intent in the actions of others. In this situation, the first fight made you angry, which likely colored your perception of the interaction with your romantic partner. Perhaps you saw your romantic partner as more hostile and less understanding than you normally would, which made you quick to respond with even more anger. By altering perception, emotions may thus sometimes perpetuate themselves, leading to extended mood states. For instance, this chapter discusses how happiness makes people more prone to identifying happy words and how fear makes people believe that future threats are more likely; in both cases, the emotion may enhance subsequent experiences of the same emotion.

5. Would winning several million dollars in the lottery make you happier? What does research on affective forecasting predict? What does the research on money and happiness have to say? How should you spend your winnings to maximize happiness?

ANSWER: Based on affective forecasting research, although you might predict that winning the lottery would increase your happiness considerably, chances are you’d be less happy after winning the lottery than you’d predicted. This may occur because of focalism, such that you would focus on the salient aspects of winning the lottery (tons of money) but would neglect the possible detractors to this newfound happiness, like complicated taxes, sudden strange fame, and potentially strained relationships with family and friends. The research discussed in this chapter would also suggest that the lottery could indeed increase happiness for some people, but only if they previously had an annual income below $75,000. In other words, money only makes people happier up to a point. To make yourself happiest with your newfound wealth, you should probably spend it on other people and on experiences rather than on yourself and on material goods.

CHAPTER 6

1. Consider an attitude object you feel strongly about, something you love or something you hate. Maybe you’re passionate about soccer. Perhaps you are staunchly opposed to capital punishment. Describe this attitude in terms of the three elements of affect, cognition, and behavior.

ANSWER: The three components of an attitude are affect (the degree to which you like or dislike the attitude object), cognition (thoughts, beliefs, memories, and images related to the attitude object), and behavior (the tendency to approach or avoid the attitude object). Let’s consider soccer as the attitude object from the perspective of someone who is passionate about the sport. With respect to affect, this person strongly likes soccer, or feels positive emotions, such as excitement, when engaging with soccer. With respect to cognition, this person probably has a large store of knowledge about soccer, including the rules of the game and statistics about players, as well as a host of memories involving soccer. These affective and cognitive components reinforce behavioral tendencies, such as the desire to watch soccer, talk about soccer, and play soccer.

2. Suppose you’re an attitude researcher and want to assess participant attitudes about the institution of marriage. Describe three methods you might use in your assessment.

ANSWER: Researchers interested in attitudes toward marriage can use a variety of measurement tools. With surveys, they can ask participants to report on a Likert scale the degree to which they believe marriage contributes to societal functioning. Measuring response latencies can indicate the strength, or accessibility, of an attitude, with participants responding faster to questions about more strongly held attitudes. To evaluate the centrality of attitudes about marriage to someone’s belief system, researchers can ask a variety of questions related to the institution of marriage. For example: Do you disapprove of divorce? Do you support traditional gender roles? Finally, researchers can use implicit measures to access nonconscious attitudes toward marriage. For example, they can employ an IAT to determine the association between marriage and good versus bad or look at brain activity when participants respond to marriage-related concepts. The latter implicit measures may be particularly useful if researchers want to study a more controversial aspect of marriage. For example, some participants may not be willing to report their attitudes about same-sex marriage.

3. You have two close friends whom you like very much, Tanya and Amanda. Unfortunately, Tanya can’t stand Amanda. This makes your life difficult, as the three of you can never spend time together without Tanya getting irritated. Based on what you learned about cognitive dissonance theory, how might you go about getting Tanya to like Amanda more?

ANSWER: One way to make Tanya like Amanda is to get Tanya to behave in ways that suggest she does in fact like Amanda. For example, you might ask Tanya to give Amanda a ride home, to help you plan Amanda’s birthday party, or to help out Amanda by picking up her laundry. If her attitude toward Amanda (she doesn’t like her) is inconsistent with her behavior toward Amanda (she behaves in a friendly way), Tanya is likely to experience cognitive dissonance and engage in dissonance reduction tactics. Since the friendly behavior has already occurred and cannot be changed, Tanya’s best option is to change her attitude. In this way, she may come to hold a more positive attitude toward Amanda than she did before.

4. Although we readily assume that attitudes relate in meaningful ways to behavior, research suggests they don’t always match up. Consider the dentist as the attitude object. Why might attitudes toward the dentist not necessarily predict behavioral responses to the dentist?

ANSWER: Attitudes toward the dentist may not predict behavioral responses to the dentist for a variety of reasons. First, attitudes do a poor job predicting behavior if there are other strong determinants of the behavior. Many people have negative attitudes about the dentist but still make dental appointments for maintaining good health and a pleasing smile. Relatedly, attitudes do a poor job predicting behavior if the components of an attitude are in conflict. People may have negative feelings (affect) about the dentist, such as anxiety or fear, but positive thoughts (cognition), such as believing that dentists are critical for maintaining good dental hygiene. Even if a person reports positive attitudes toward the dentist, they may still experience aversion at a gut level, particularly when seeing the drill! Often, these nonconscious or automatic responses to a stimulus are stronger determinants of behavior than more thoughtful, conscious beliefs are. Attitudes may also do a poor job predicting behavior if the attitudes are measured at a different level of specificity than the behavior (attitudes about dentists in general as opposed to behavior toward a particular dentist).

5. Suppose you’re choosing between two vacation spots you think are equally amazing: Greece and Costa Rica. You have to pick one, and you elect to go to Costa Rica. Following your decision, Costa Rica starts to sound even more fantastic—zip-lining, cloud forests, and incredible wildlife. In contrast, Greece seems a little less special: It’s expensive, and the beaches aren’t really that nice. According to cognitive dissonance theory, how might you account for this change in your attitude following the decision?

ANSWER: Cognitive dissonance theory states that inconsistencies between a person’s attitude and behavior can lead to an aversive emotional state called dissonance. After choosing Costa Rica for your vacation, you may experience post-decision dissonance because there is an inconsistency between your attitude (I like Greece) and your behavior (I did not choose Greece). To reduce this dissonance, you will probably change your attitude to better fit your behavior: You did not choose Greece (the behavior), so you must not have liked Greece very much after all (a change in your attitude). In this way, Greece starts to seem less exciting, while Costa Rica starts to seem like an even better choice.

6. Although your son already likes vegetables, you want him to eat even more of them. You decide to pay him $1 to spend at the toy store for every portion of vegetables he eats. Given what you learned about self-perception theory, is this a good approach? Why or why not?

ANSWER: You can use rewards and punishments to modify your son’s behavior, such as offering him $1 to spend at the toy store for each portion of vegetables he eats. Surely, that would entice him to eat more vegetables, right? However, there is a risk of the overjustification effect when strong rewards are given. According to this phenomenon, we tend to devalue activities we perform in order to get something else. So if you give your son $1 for eating vegetables, he may take notice of his behavior and think, “Hmm, I’m eating more and more veggies,” but then recognize, “Oh! But I’m doing it to get the dollar.” If your son started out liking vegetables, he will come to perceive himself as someone who eats vegetables—but who does so for the money. Once you stop paying him that dollar, he’s likely to stop eating more vegetables, and he’s even likely to eat *fewer* vegetables than he did before.

CHAPTER 7

1. A new boutique coffeehouse just opened in your neighborhood featuring coffee sustainably sourced from small organic farms around the world. Design two ads for the coffeehouse, one using the central route to persuasion and one using the peripheral route. How do your ads differ?

ANSWER: The central route to persuasion occurs when the audience thinks carefully about the message’s content—that is, when they have the motivation and ability to do so. An ad for the coffeehouse focusing on the central route will include strong arguments in support of the coffee and the shop itself. For example, your ad might state that sustainably sourced coffee is better for the environment, organic coffee is better for your health, in taste tests this coffee is preferred over those sold at other local shops, or the price is better. The peripheral route to persuasion occurs when the audience has low motivation or ability to think critically about the message. Following this route, they respond to superficial or easy-to-process features, such as the attractiveness or credibility of the message source. For example, you may recruit a famous chef or a trusted community leader to endorse the coffeehouse, or you might simply show an attractive person drinking the coffee. Alternatively, you might include colorful images of the coffee. All of these factors are easy to process and thus likely to persuade through the peripheral route.

2. Describe the three elements of a persuasive appeal and give two examples of each element that influences persuasiveness.

ANSWER: The three elements of persuasion are source characteristics, message characteristics, and audience characteristics. Source characteristics are features of the person delivering the message. Attractive sources are more persuasive than unattractive sources. Credible sources high in expertise and trustworthiness are more apt to persuade, particularly in the present (less so with a delay—the sleeper effect). Certain or confident sources are also more likely to persuade than are uncertain or less confident sources.

In terms of message characteristics, high-quality messages are more persuasive than low-quality messages, particularly if the audience is high in motivation and ability. Explicit messages are more likely to persuade than are messages in which the take-home point isn’t clear. Messages that overtly refute the opposition are more persuasive, as are messages in which the spokespeople argue in opposition to their own self-interests. Vivid, colorful, interesting, and memorable messages are typically persuasive, as are messages that induce fear to a moderate degree (particularly if coupled with information about how to counter the feared outcome). Finally, messages may vary in norms, values, and outlook and may be especially persuasive if they match the cultural background of the target audience.

Audience characteristics are features of the person or group on the receiving end of the message. Audiences vary in their motivation and ability to process the message. Those higher in motivation and ability are inclined to be persuaded by strong arguments, whereas people with low motivation and ability are more likely to be persuaded by superficial features of the message. Older participants and those with a stronger need for cognition tend to focus on argument quality when being persuaded. A person’s mood can influence persuasion too.

3. Suppose you are part of a global advertising team responsible for creating ads for oatmeal in both South Korea and the United States. Design an ad for each country and explain why you designed the ads the way you did.

ANSWER: When designing an ad, advertising teams must consider the cultural context of the message. One relevant variable is whether the culture encourages more independent or more interdependent construals of the self. Independent cultures, such as the United States, focus on individual uniqueness and self-actualization. Ads targeting such cultures should focus on the connection between the product and an individual’s success or well-being. For example, an oatmeal ad in the United States might emphasize the ability of oatmeal to help *you* grow healthy and strong and become the best version of yourself to achieve your hopes and dreams.

Interdependent cultures, such as South Korea, focus on social harmony. Ads targeting these cultures should focus on the connection between the product and one’s social relationships. For example, an oatmeal ad in South Korea might encourage parents to buy oatmeal to help the *family* become healthy and strong.

4. What is the hostile media phenomenon? Describe an example of this phenomenon. How might this phenomenon be avoided or overridden?

ANSWER: The hostile media phenomenon refers to the tendency to view media coverage as biased against one’s own side and in favor of the opposing side. A real-world example is when pro-Israel individuals view media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to be biased against Israelis and more favorable toward Palestinians (while people with pro-Palestine views believe the reverse to be true). Although the tendency to see bias in the media is robust, people may avoid or overcome this bias by deliberately choosing media outlets with a strong reputation of reporting unbiased, objective news. Fact-checking the contents of a media piece before drawing any conclusions about bias would also be useful.

5. Tyrell and his girlfriend, Shea, have very different views on capital punishment: He opposes it, while she supports it.

Even after Tyrell presents evidence that capital punishment is both financially wasteful and ineffective at preventing crime, Shea does not change her views. Using what you know about resistance to persuasion, how might Shea be staving off Tyrell’s attempts to persuade her?

ANSWER: Persuasive attempts are often met with strong resistance. Even before Tyrell overtly presents Shea with counterattitudinal information, she is likely to engage in selective attention, tuning in to messages that reinforce her attitudes on capital punishment and tuning out information that contradicts them. She might seek out media outlets that support her perspective and avoid conversations with people who believe the contrary. Shea is also likely to selectively evaluate counterattitudinal messages, such as the information Tyrell presented. She might regard the arguments as weak and their sources as seriously lacking in credibility. Shea may also frame the issue in a way that bolsters her preexisting stance—for example, she may focus on capital punishment’s role in deterrence. Moreover, the more Shea knows about capital punishment, the more she will scrutinize Tyrell’s messages in this way. Such processes are especially likely to occur if Shea made prior commitments to her attitudes, such as by joining a capital punishment advocacy group or posting articles that support her beliefs on social media.

CHAPTER 8

1. What two reasons appear to explain why people so often mimic one another?

ANSWER: The two explanations for mimicry are as follows: (1) We are more likely to do something if it pops into our mind by virtue of witnessing someone else do it. (2) Mimicry enhances rapport and prepares us to have smooth interactions.

2. Suppose your dining hall is having a contest, and you have to guess how many gumballs are in a giant jar (the closest guess wins). You and a few friends walk up to the gumball jar and tell your guesses to the volunteer running the contest. Your friends all say their guesses out loud, and you go last. You find yourself increasing your gumball estimate to be closer to those of your friends. How could each type of social influence (normative and informational) have affected your guess? How could you reduce the normative social influence in this situation?

ANSWER: Given that you’re making a judgment about something uncertain (there’s not an obvious right answer), you may have used your friends’ guesses as a useful source of information, helping you arrive at a judgment that seemed more accurate; this is informational social influence. But given that you’re also stating these judgments publicly, there is pressure to state a judgment that is similar to those of your friends so you won’t be seen as odd or clueless; this is normative social influence. You could reduce the normative social influence inherent in this situation by privately submitting your answers on pieces of paper rather than stating them out loud.

3. In the battle for transgender rights, what kind of social influence can trans activists exert on the majority? Should their goal be to engage public support or to inspire private

internalization and acceptance of their arguments among members of the majority?

ANSWER: When minority groups influence majority groups to enact social change, it is typically via informational social influence, convincing members of the majority group to hear out their arguments and better understand their perspective. Normative social influence, which typically results in mere public compliance (without any private acceptance of trans rights arguments or positions), is a less powerful tool here, as the majority doesn’t feel much pressure to conform and avoid public scorn; they largely control the public scorn, after all. Luckily, informational social influence is a powerful force, one that is more likely to result in private acceptance and internalization of the minority perspective among members of the majority, which will likely aid the LGBTQ cause more in the long run.

4. Suppose you want to increase voting rates among members of Generation Z (people born after 1997). Using the different approaches discussed in this chapter, give three examples of how you might do so.

ANSWER: You could use a foot-in-the-door technique: You might ask eligible voters to do small volunteering duties for the election, which would highlight their sense of self as politically engaged individuals, hopefully leading to more behavior consistent with that sense of self, such as voting.

Alternatively, you could give away cookies on the street on Election Day to induce positive emotion before reminding people to vote, which could lead them to construe the act of voting as not terribly inconvenient and make them more inclined to engage in a valued civic act to further or sustain their good mood.

In addition, you could create flyers that highlight how many people vote in certain neighborhoods and age groups, but you'd have to be careful not to advertise a norm of *not* voting if rates were low. Adding a smiling face along with the numbers could help communicate that high voting rates are desirable.

5. In the context of the Milgram experiment, give an example of how altering the "presence" or salience of the experimenter or the learner affects obedience rates.

ANSWER: Having participants hold the learner's hand against the shock plate while administering the shocks makes the participants more aware of what they're doing to another person by obeying the instructions of the experimenter, thereby reducing obedience rates. In contrast, having the experimenter administer instructions over an intercom rather than in person tends to reduce the experimenter's authority and influence over the participant, thus reducing obedience.

CHAPTER 9

1. The need to belong is thought to be a fundamental human drive, similar to physical drives such as hunger. When the need to belong is satisfied, people are unlikely to pursue this drive further. Given this premise, who is more likely to call up a friend to make plans: Betty, who’s been spending lots of quality time with her children lately, or Blanche, who tends to stay home by herself?

ANSWER: If the need to belong resembles physical drives such as hunger, the less belonging one feels, the more “socially hungry” one should feel and the more motivated one should be to try to connect with others. This feeling of low belonging is like the feeling of an empty stomach, and it motivates a person to seek social contact. In this scenario, Blanche should be hungrier for social contact and more likely to seek out connection with a friend, compared with Betty, who should have her fill of social contact from spending time with her children.

2. Sean and Mitch are just starting a relationship, but they seem to have different expectations about what they each deserve from a romantic partner. Sean thinks that if his partner doesn’t treat him extremely well, then that romantic partner is just not worth his time because there are better guys out there. Mitch, on the other hand, has been in several bad relationships and puts up with just about anything from a partner because he’s deeply afraid of being alone. How would you describe Sean and Mitch’s respective comparison levels and comparison levels for alternatives? What might the consequences of these levels be?

ANSWER: Sean appears to have a higher comparison level than Mitch because he believes he deserves better treatment from his romantic partners than Mitch believes he himself does. Sean’s comparison level for alternatives in this scenario is high because he thinks there are better guys out there than a romantic partner who doesn't treat him extremely well. This suggests that Sean sees many potential rewards (high-quality partners) outside of his relationship. Coupled with his high comparison level, Sean may be quick to leave his relationship with Mitch if he doesn't get the treatment he thinks he deserves. Mitch's comparison level for alternatives is low; he sees being alone as an undesirable alternative. This suggests that Mitch may put up with more bad behavior from a partner due to both his low comparison level and his low comparison level for alternatives; he doesn't expect much from his partner and doesn't see many desirable alternatives to being in his current relationship.

3. Jenny feels comfortable relying on and being close to her immediate family members, and she seeks extremely intimate, clingy romantic relationships. However, she keeps her distance from her friends, not disclosing much to them or counting on them. How would you analyze her attachment styles? How would you describe her working models?

ANSWER: It sounds like Jenny has distinct attachment styles for the different types of relationships in her life. She has a secure attachment style with her family because she feels comfortable trusting them and doesn't seem to worry about being close to them. But with her romantic partners, Jenny wants to be exceedingly close and intimate; this is characteristic of an anxious attachment style. With her friends, Jenny seems avoidant, seeking extreme independence and showing reluctance to be close and dependent. Jenny seems to have multiple attachment working models (corresponding to her three styles of attachment) that become activated and applied differently in various relationships.

4. Robert has a crush on Marilyn, but she doesn't seem to know he exists. What can Robert do to make himself more attractive to Marilyn based on the principles of proximity and similarity?

ANSWER: If Robert wants to capitalize on proximity, he should find a way to get physically close to Marilyn, such as sitting near her in lecture. The more mere exposure Marilyn experiences with Robert, the more Marilyn should come to like him, so any way he can increase the probability of their paths crossing should help his cause. If he wants to capitalize on similarity, Robert should highlight the ways he and Marilyn are similar, such as by playing up the interests they have in common. The more similar Robert appears to be to Marilyn, the more rewarding their interactions will be, and the more Marilyn should feel validated about herself.

5. Suppose Alice wants to try an experiment about the halo effect of physical attractiveness on an online dating website. She sets up two profiles for herself, making the content of the profiles identical except for her picture. On one profile, she uses a beautiful photo of herself as her profile photo, but on the other profile, she uses a horrible photo of herself. How might men respond to these two profiles, and how might Alice respond to them in turn?

ANSWER: Based on the halo effect, the different photos should create self-fulfilling prophecies for Alice’s experiences on each profile. When men on the site are interacting with the profile with the good photo, they may see her content as more charming, interesting, and attractive than the content coming from the profile with the bad photo. In turn, they may write more interesting, engaging messages to the profile with the good photo, and they may see her responses to those messages as wittier and funnier. Moreover, Alice’s responses could also be affected by the manipulation; she may feel more engaged with the men who are interacting with her good-photo profile and actually write better messages. In this way, the heightened expectations men have based on this profile may end up actually eliciting a better side of Alice, compared with Alice’s behavior when interacting via the bad-photo profile.

6. How can the investment model of commitment help explain why people stay in long-term abusive relationships? How might an abusive partner manipulate the factors that contribute to commitment to make an abuse victim stay in the relationship?

ANSWER: In abusive relationships, satisfaction is probably fairly low since the costs are great. But satisfaction is not the only determinant of commitment; we should also consider possible alternative partners and investments in the relationship. Investment in an abusive relationship may be high if the partners are married, financially linked, have children and property together, and have intertwined lives. In any long-term relationship, many resources have been devoted to the relationship over the years. It’s possible that an abusive romantic partner would deliberately increase investment on the part of the abused partner—for instance, by having more children or making more joint commitments (such as loans)—or would find ways to remind the partner of all the investments that have already been made. Alternative partners may also come into play: Perhaps partners in abusive relationships feel that there are no other options and that at least having the “good” times with the current partner is better than being alone or with some unknown other. Abusive partners could well manipulate perceptions of alternatives, such as making critical comments that make an abuse victim feel unworthy of love from anyone else. The cycle of abuse is powerful, and leaving is not always determined by something as simple as low satisfaction.

CHAPTER 10

1. Is it possible for people to be prejudiced without being aware of it? How have researchers addressed this question, and what evidence have they found?

ANSWER: Research suggests that it is indeed possible for people to be prejudiced without necessarily being aware of it. Implicit measures, such as the implicit association test (IAT), can reveal subtle, nonconscious prejudice even among those who sincerely believe they are not prejudiced. In research described in this chapter, participants whose IAT scores showed implicit prejudice toward Black Americans were more likely to show activation in a brain area associated with fear when they viewed Black faces, but they were not more likely to report prejudiced beliefs on the Modern Racism Scale. These results suggest that people may hold attitudes they are either unable or unwilling to acknowledge.

2. Suppose that every year the male CEO of a small company asks a female employee to organize the company’ s holiday party. When one female employee asks the CEO why he always gives this task to women, he says that women are better party planners than men. Is this an example of sexism? Why or why not? What adverse effects might the CEO’ s positive stereotype regarding women’ s party planning ability have on the female employees?

ANSWER: The CEO’ s characterization of women as skilled party planners is an example of benevolent sexism, which refers to positive stereotypes of outgroup members that can nonetheless lead to discrimination and impede social progress. Although the CEO’ s attitude toward women seems positive, it may also have negative components, such as the belief that women are not as effective as men in important leadership roles. His attitude may also make his female employees feel they need to conform to traditional female gender roles in order to gain his approval. Another potential cost of the CEO’ s behavior is that his female employees may have to devote valuable time, which they could be spending on other work, to tasks that are not part of their job description and not helpful for advancing their career.

3. Describe the Robbers Cave experiment and outline three important points this study revealed about intergroup relations.

ANSWER: After intense screening, the researchers enrolled 22 average boys into their summer camp. The boys were split into two groups and spent the first phase of the study developing a strong group identity through participation in games and activities. In the second phase, the two groups were brought together for a camp competition. The group that won the competition would receive a desirable prize, while the losing group would receive nothing. The researchers evaluated intergroup relations and found that hostility between the groups was rampant. Following this competition phase, the researchers brought the groups together under friendlier circumstances. Intergroup conflict did not dissipate. Subsequently, the researchers staged various camp “crises” the boys had to solve by working together. Cooperation, here induced by external demands, did mitigate the conflict between the groups.

This study contributed important insights to the economic perspective, specifically realistic group conflict theory. Three important points from this study include the following. (1) Competition over resources fosters intergroup conflict. During the competition phase, the boys fought over material resources: a medal, along with a highly coveted pocketknife. Here, hostility abounded, involving name-calling, food fights, cabin raids, and challenges to fight. (2) Defusing intergroup conflict cannot be accomplished through contact alone. During the third phase, the boys were brought together under noncompetitive circumstances, but name-calling and fighting persisted. (3) Emphasizing superordinate goals relevant to both groups is necessary in order for contact to mitigate intergroup conflict. Once the boys worked together to solve the camp crises, including fixing a broken water pipe and pulling a broken-down supply truck with a rope, hostility dissolved and friendships developed among the group members.

4. Imagine that a conversation about race relations in the United States develops during a family dinner. One of your relatives argues that given how ubiquitous stereotypes are, prejudice and discrimination are inevitable. Using research from the cognitive perspective, and controlled and automatic processing in particular, how would you respond to this assertion? Are prejudice and discrimination inevitable? Under which conditions are they most likely to emerge?

ANSWER: As your relative argues, research finds that even unprejudiced people are aware of cultural stereotypes. Moreover, these stereotypes are likely to be activated automatically, quickly, and reflexively. Research described in this chapter found that participants who were primed (outside of their conscious awareness) with words related to stereotypes of Black Americans were more likely to perceive a target’s behavior as hostile in a subsequent task. This automatic stereotyping effect was found even among people who were unprejudiced as measured with the Modern Racism Scale. These results, however, do not suggest that prejudice and discrimination are inevitable under all circumstances. If people are motivated and have cognitive resources available, they can still engage in controlled processing to regulate these automatic tendencies. In a subsequent study, participants described characteristics of Black Americans. This task involved controlled processing. Participants had the time and energy to respond as they saw fit. Even though all participants were aware of negative stereotypes (as demonstrated in the first study), unprejudiced participants listed fewer negative characteristics than prejudiced participants. Collectively, these results suggest that although unprejudiced people are aware of stereotypes, when controlled processing is possible they will take care not to use them. Under such circumstances, prejudice and discrimination are not inevitable, contrary to your relative’s argument.

5. Suppose you are a social psychologist and have been hired to help reduce prejudice and discrimination among students of different races, classes, cultures, and sexual orientations in a school system. What might you suggest in addressing this concern?

ANSWER: According to the contact hypothesis, bringing together students of different backgrounds is an important first step in reducing prejudice and discrimination. However, research suggests that simple contact between groups is not enough. For example, participants in the Robbers Cave experiment continued to display intergroup hostility after the competition phase, when the groups were brought together under friendlier circumstances. Additional conditions must be met for contact to work. Members of each group must have equal status. Teachers and administrators must not favor one group over another in the classroom or other institutional programs. Moreover, parents, teachers, and community members must support the contact and not endorse it begrudgingly. As the Robbers Cave experiment showed, superordinate goals that prompt cooperation between groups help reduce intergroup hostility and catalyze the development of friendships. You might recommend that teachers institute a jigsaw classroom, in which students from different backgrounds are responsible for different parts of an assignment and must therefore work together to complete the assignment. In addition, one-on-one interactions help people see others as more than just outgroup members. Assigning students from different backgrounds to work in pairs in the classroom or during other school activities could foster this kind of individualized contact.

CHAPTER 11

1. Suppose a woman named Taylor was applying for a job at an accounting firm, and applicants had to complete a math test as part of the on-site interview process. If Taylor met her older male interviewer just before taking the math test and he (inappropriately) exclaimed, “You’ re Taylor? I was expecting, well, a man,” what impact might that have on Taylor’ s test performance, interview performance, and eventual likelihood of getting the job?

ANSWER: Taylor will likely experience stereotype threat during her math test, meaning she will become concerned that she will fulfill the stereotype that women are bad at math, and this concern will ultimately detract from her performance on the test, thus fulfilling the stereotype after all. She may also struggle during the interview if she believes that her interviewer is biased against her or if her interviewer is in fact biased against her and treats her differently than he would treat male applicants for the job. This may result in a self-fulfilling prophecy, wherein Taylor and/or her interviewer expect her to do poorly, thus causing her to do poorly and costing her the job.

2. In what ways is the tendency for people to pay more attention to their headwinds than to their tailwinds helpful or useful? In what ways does it create problems?

ANSWER: The tendency is helpful because it facilitates adaptive action. It creates problems because it can feed resentment and a sense of entitlement, and it makes it harder for people to be grateful, an emotion that promotes social harmony and feeds social connection.

3. Suppose Taylor gets the job at the accounting firm and quickly rises through the ranks, eventually finding a position in middle management. How might her personality as a

hard-charging, very direct person lead to some problems in her quest to rise further to senior management, when so many members of the existing senior management team are no less hard-charging—a trait that did not hinder their careers? What would you advise her to do to overcome those problems?

ANSWER: Women are often judged negatively for the same direct, assertive behaviors that go unnoticed in men, and those negative reactions can damage their career prospects. Some people might advise Taylor to couch her directness as assertiveness in the service of communal ends—for example, to make sure “our division” thrives, that “this project” is successful, that “the company” stays competitive.

4. Mindful of an angry anti-elite populism gripping the country, your university (which sends a number of people into “the elite” each year) hires you to try to improve the public perception of members of the professional class. What would you recommend?

ANSWER: Elites are seen as high on competence but low on warmth, so any public relations campaign should be geared toward making elites seem warmer. One way to do so is to highlight their philanthropic efforts, especially those seen as benefiting people in need (e.g., Bill Gates’ s efforts to fight malaria and AIDS around the world; former president Jimmy Carter building housing with Habitat for Humanity volunteers), not those that mark the donor as more elite (e.g., funding the construction of a new building at an elite university; funding a new wing of an art museum or opera house).

CHAPTER 12

1. Open-plan offices, where large communal desks are used in place of private rooms or cubicles, are becoming increasingly popular. From the perspective of Zajonc's social facilitation theory, do you think open-plan offices are likely to facilitate or hinder performance and productivity? Why or why not? How might it depend on the type of work being conducted?

ANSWER: According to Zajonc's social facilitation theory, the presence of others tends to increase physiological arousal, which facilitates performance on well-learned, reflexive tasks but can impair performance on more complex tasks. Open-plan offices may therefore facilitate performance and productivity for employees who work at simple, repetitive tasks, whereas they may hinder performance for those who work on novel, unpredictable, and highly challenging tasks. For the latter group, private rooms may be more beneficial.

2. Can you think of any times in your own life when groupthink has taken place? What factors contributed to groupthink in these situations? What kinds of safeguards could you put in place in similar future situations to promote better decision making?

ANSWER: Groupthink refers to the tendency for highly cohesive groups to make poor decisions when critical scrutiny of the issues at hand is subverted by social pressures to reach consensus. Examples relevant to students could involve decisions made by a close group of friends, a student organization, a sports team, or a group working on a class project together. Factors that can contribute to groupthink include the presence of a dominant leader, a sense of invulnerability and moral superiority, a narrow consideration of alternatives, and self-censorship of important information and conflicting viewpoints for fear of disrupting group harmony. Approaches that have been shown to reduce groupthink include designating “devil’s advocates” to take alternative positions and point out weaknesses in the plan, welcoming outside input to protect against insularity, and having group leaders refrain from making their opinions or preferences known at the beginning of the discussion.

3. Suppose your company is trying to decide whether to make a risky new hire. Individually, most of the members of the hiring team lean toward hiring the candidate, as it could substantially increase revenues if it works out. When the hiring team gets together to discuss the potential hire, how are the attitudes of the group members likely to shift? What decision is likely to be made?

ANSWER: According to research on group polarization, group decisions tend to be more extreme than those made by individuals, and they tend to be extreme in whatever direction individuals are already leaning. In the hiring decision example, individuals are already leaning in favor of the risky hire, so the group discussion is likely to polarize individuals further in that direction and increase the likelihood that the hire will be made. Group polarization may be due in part to exposure to additional persuasive arguments from others and in part to the desire to measure up favorably in comparison with others (that is, to appear even more comfortable with risk than others if riskiness is valued).

4. In The Prince, Machiavelli argued that people gain power through deception, manipulation, coercion, and the use of fear tactics. How does this perspective compare with research findings about who rises to power?

ANSWER: According to the research, people typically gain power by having knowledge and expertise that is relevant to the goals and identity of the group, by possessing strong social skills and building cooperative alliances among group members, and by demonstrating generosity and fairness. These findings suggest that Machiavelli’s perspective may apply on occasion but may not be generally accurate.

5. Do you think it’s accurate to say that power corrupts? Why or why not? What factors influence the extent to which power leads to prosocial versus antisocial behavior?

ANSWER: Power involves the freedom to act on one’s own wishes without being constrained by others’ wishes. According to the approach/inhibition theory of power, this lack of constraint and inhibition can lead high-power people to make impulsive decisions, stereotype others, feel less empathy, and engage in antisocial behaviors, such as sexual harassment and aggression. Low-power people, by contrast, need to be more cautious and socially attuned because their outcomes are more dependent on others. Another key factor is the extent to which a high-power individual has a communally oriented disposition to begin with. The acquisition of power can lead communally oriented individuals to behave more prosocially, rather than selfishly.

6. How does research on deindividuation help explain why crime rates are so high on Halloween?

ANSWER: Deindividuation refers to a reduced sense of individual identity accompanied by diminished self-regulation that can occur in a large group. Deindividuation is fueled by anonymity, diffusion of responsibility, and high levels of arousal, all of which are common on Halloween, when people are disguised in masks and costumes, shrouded in darkness, and likely to move around in large packs. As a result, people might be more prone to engage in destructive and illegal behaviors that they would not otherwise engage in, such as vandalism, theft, or assault.

7. How could you use your knowledge of self-awareness theory to reduce cheating behavior on a test that relies on the honor system?

ANSWER: People are more likely to behave in line with their internal standards and values—and therefore behave more ethically—when they focus attention on themselves. One way to increase self-awareness and thereby reduce cheating could be to put a mirror in the testing room or have students walk by a mirror before taking the test. Another approach could be to display objects that look like eyes or faces in the room so students have the implicit sense that their behavior is being monitored. This approach has proven effective for promoting contributions to an “honest box” in exchange for the use of shared resources, such as milk for coffee in an office setting.

CHAPTER 13

1. Describe the culture of honor, and provide two pieces of evidence that such a culture exists in the U.S. South. What might be the origin of these cultural tendencies?

ANSWER: A culture of honor, such as the one in parts of the U.S. South, is characterized by strong concerns regarding reputation. Acts of aggression or violence may be used to avenge insults or other threats to one’ s honor. According to research covered in this chapter, homicides resulting from perceived insult are more common in the South than in the North, and people from the South have been found to react with greater emotion when insulted. There are no differences in the rates of other types of crimes between the North and South. Cultures of honor are believed to grow out of societies that rely on animal herding as a main source of income, in which a herder’ s entire livelihood would be lost if someone stole the herder’ s animals.

2. According to the research described in this chapter, what kinds of attitudes and behaviors are more likely among men who dehumanize women?

ANSWER: Men who show faster response times to pairings of the concept of “woman” with animal-related words, indicating implicit dehumanization, are more likely to report a willingness to sexually harass and rape women and to believe that women sometimes deserve to be raped.

3. Suppose you’ re the warden at a prison and can select the temperature setting for the master prison thermostat. The thermostat doesn’ t have enough settings, forcing you to choose between an uncomfortably cold setting and an uncomfortably hot setting. Which should you choose, and why?

ANSWER: Given the strong connection between hot temperatures and aggressive behavior, you may want to set the thermostat a bit too cold rather than too hot. If the temperature is too hot, the prisoners might start to exhibit increasingly aggressive behavior (due, perhaps, to attributing their discomfort to their fellow inmates rather than to the prison’s temperature), which could result in more fights and potentially spiral into a prison riot. It would be safer, at least in terms of levels of aggression, to err on the side of the prison being too cool.

4. Sometimes people respond to social rejection with physical aggression. How does the fundamental nature of our need for social connectedness help explain this tendency?

ANSWER: Humans are an inherently social species and have evolved a fundamental system to maintain social connectedness, which probably aided our early survival. Because social rejection was a kind of death sentence, we have a basic aversive response to it that activates a threat defense system. This system triggers responses normally cued by physical threats, such as surges in stress hormones, aroused fight-or-flight patterns, and increased defensive aggressive tendencies.

5. Suppose a friend said to you, “Well, men are just biologically hardwired to be more aggressive than women.” How would you respond? What nuances might this perspective miss?

ANSWER: First, women do exhibit aggression but in different ways than men do. Women more commonly express relational aggression, which involves emotional rather than physical forms of harm, such as spreading rumors and damaging others’ reputations. Second, although some biological factors dictate gender differences in aggression, such as testosterone levels and overall size and strength, cultural factors also play a role. From a very young age, boys and girls are treated differently, and aggressive behavior is more encouraged among boys than among girls. Thus, any gender differences in physical aggression may not be purely biologically determined but may be encouraged by cultural values as well.

6. What kinds of strategies have been shown to be most effective for reducing conflict and promoting peace, and why?

ANSWER: Face-to-face communication involving respectful dialogue and complex reasoning has been shown to facilitate conflict resolution by encouraging participants to find common ground and overcome misperceptions of the their opponents. It can also be helpful to understand that violence is often motivated not by bloodlust but by a genuine sense of moral obligation, misguided as it may be; failure to recognize the motivation for violence can lead to ineffective military interventions. Formal and informal reconciliation processes involving confession, apology, taking responsibility, and making reparations have been shown to be highly effective; for example, crime victims who participate in restorative justice programs report fewer thoughts of revenge.

CHAPTER 14

1. Someone might argue that as long as you’re helping, your motives don’t matter. Do you agree? Why or why not? In what situations might motives matter most?

ANSWER: There are three primary motives for helping. Two of them are egoistic (selfish): the desire for social rewards and the desire to reduce personal distress. The third is unselfish: empathic concern. Although the two egoistic motives can lead to helping behavior, they do so less consistently than empathic concern does. Getting social rewards or reducing personal distress can be achieved many ways, not all of which involve helping. By contrast, empathic concern has been shown to consistently lead to helping, often at a cost to the self. People who are motivated by social rewards and distress reduction may help only when rewards are available and when there are no other ways to reduce distress, but they may be less likely to help when helping behavior would be anonymous or when it’s possible to easily escape the situation.

2. If you were working as a canvasser collecting signatures for a petition to ban the clear-cutting of an old growth forest home to many rare species, what strategies could you use to increase your signature count given what you know about moral foundations theory and the effects of disgust on moral judgment?

ANSWER: Disgust intensifies judgments that impure acts are morally wrong. Acts that reduce the purity of the natural world are considered by many to be immoral, and can stir people to take action. To collect more signatures, you might try to target people who are already feeling disgust about another stimulus. For instance, you could try standing next to a smelly garbage can or collecting signatures from people picking up trash on the side of the road. Or you could use a more traditional strategy of simply discussing the supposedly impure aspects of clear-cutting forests prior to requesting a signature.

3. Based on what you’ve learned about bystander intervention and diffusion of responsibility, what actions could you take to increase the likelihood that someone would help you in an emergency that happens in front of a large crowd?

ANSWER: People are less likely to help when others are around, presumably because they believe that someone else will step in and help. One way to reduce this diffusion of responsibility could be to single out one person and ask if that person can help you. People hesitate to help when they don’t know whether a situation is actually an emergency and when they don’t know what to do to help. To address this concern, you could clarify the situation by explicitly calling out and being specific about what you need people to do, such as helping you get up or calling an ambulance.

4. Research indicates that people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be more empathic and giving than people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. What factors might explain this difference? How might they relate to what you learned about power and prosocial behavior?

ANSWER: People from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more attuned to those around them, in part because social attunement is necessary for adapting to unpredictable, stressful, and at times threatening environments. People from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, by contrast, can be more independent from others because they enjoy greater resources and opportunities. This pattern is similar to that seen in the context of power. High-power people tend to be less empathic. People from higher socioeconomic backgrounds may also be less likely to be regularly exposed to certain forms of suffering, but this can be remedied. Research suggests, for example, that it’s possible to increase compassion and prosocial behavior in people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds by exposing them to film clips portraying the suffering of children living in poverty.

5. According to evolutionary theory, behaviors that optimize survival and reproduction are favored by natural selection and are therefore more likely to persist. How, then, can we explain the evolution of altruism, which is by definition costly to the self?

ANSWER: One possible evolutionary explanation for altruism is kin selection, whereby evolution and natural selection favor behaviors that increase the chances of survival of genetic relatives. Kin selection can explain altruism toward relatives but not altruism toward non-kin. An explanation for altruism toward non-kin is reciprocity, or helping others with the expectation that they will reciprocate in the future. Reciprocal altruism can reduce the likelihood of conflict and facilitate resource sharing.

6. After learning about research on gossip, have your feelings about this behavior changed? Under what circumstances might gossip serve a useful purpose?

ANSWER: Gossip is a communicative act in which someone comments on the reputation of another person who is not present. This communication can be beneficial when it helps people learn about whom to trust and whom to avoid. Research suggests that when people have the opportunity to gossip, they are consequently more cooperative than when they don’t have such an opportunity. This may be because the threat of gossip serves as a warning that one’s reputation could suffer if one behaves selfishly. Not all types of gossip are beneficial, however; mean-spirited comments about someone’s appearance will not promote cooperation or goodwill.

7. In what ways could the tit-for-tat strategy be relevant in your life, such as in a romantic relationship?

ANSWER: Tit-for-tat is a strategy to encourage mutual cooperation in the prisoner's dilemma game. This reciprocal strategy is cooperative, nonenvious, nonexploitable, forgiving, and easy to read. It helps maximize outcomes in potentially competitive situations that occur in real life. In the context of a romantic relationship, this strategy could involve being supportive and giving toward your partner initially and continuing to do so as long as your partner is supportive and giving toward you—but changing your behavior if your partner mistreats you.

APPLICATION MODULE 1: SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND HEALTH

1. The experience of psychological stress typically triggers a host of physiological changes, including increased heart rate and blood pressure, sweating, and suppression of the immune system. When might these changes be helpful, and when are they more likely to be harmful?

ANSWER: The stress response evolved to help humans respond adaptively to threats in their environment and maximize their chance of survival. Increases in heart rate and blood pressure serve to distribute blood to appropriate muscle groups involved in fight-or-flight behavior, sweating helps regulate body temperature and may facilitate grasping, and the suppression of the immune system frees up resources for more pressing tasks. These physiological changes can be helpful for coping with short-term dangers, but when stress is chronic, they can lead to organ damage and the development of ulcers, heart disease, and cancer. Rumination, the tendency to think about a stressful event repeatedly, can contribute to chronic stress and increase health risks.

2. Who is more likely to suffer from health problems, a janitor or a Fortune 500 CEO, and why? How might their

subjective construals of their positions influence their health?

ANSWER: We might expect the janitor to be less healthy than the CEO, based on research showing that lower-SES individuals (those who have less family wealth and income, less education, and less prestigious jobs) are more likely to have health problems than higher-SES people are. This difference can be explained by a number of factors, such as the presence of greater environmental toxins and less access to health care in lower-SES neighborhoods. Another explanation is that lower-SES people are more likely to feel that they occupy a subordinate rank in society and therefore experience greater stress. In some cases, however, even people in objectively high positions, such as CEOs, may feel inferior relative to their peers and experience stress-related health issues as a result. By the same token, janitors may enjoy high status within their community and experience good health as a result.

3. According to the tend-and-befriend theory, why might providing social support improve health?

ANSWER: When we tend to the needs of other people, the chemical oxytocin is released into our brain and bloodstream. Oxytocin has been shown to increase feelings of trust and love and to reduce the stress hormone cortisol. Reduced cortisol levels can in turn benefit physical health. This research suggests that people may be able to improve their health by giving support to others, not just by receiving support.

4. Research indicates that optimistic people tend to enjoy better health. Can you conclude from these findings that becoming more optimistic will improve your health? Why or why not? If you were a researcher conducting a study on this topic, what other factors might you want to control for?

ANSWER: No, it is not possible to infer causality from a correlational study design. Optimistic people may enjoy better health in part because they have a better prognosis to begin with, among other reasons unrelated to optimism. As a researcher, it would be important to control for factors such as current health status, disease prognosis, and available financial and social resources. It would also be helpful to experimentally increase optimism in a group of randomly chosen participants and compare this group’ s health over time with that of a control group.

APPLICATION MODULE 2: SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION

1. On the first day of summer volleyball camp, what is likely to happen if the camp counselors are told that the campers in cabin 1 are on the verge of a growth and strength spurt compared with the campers in cabin 2? How large will the effect of this manipulation probably be? What factors would increase or reduce the impact of this manipulation?

ANSWER: Based on the results of studies described in this module, the manipulated expectations should make the camp counselors expect and ultimately elicit stronger performance from the campers in cabin 1. However, as many follow-up studies have demonstrated, the effect might not be particularly strong. The manipulation would have a smaller impact if the counselors were given this information halfway through the summer, but the manipulation could have a larger impact if the campers in cabin 1 were low achieving and/or beginners at volleyball.

2. Suppose Alex is choosing between two math classes for next semester. She can take either Math 301, which is outside her comfort zone but would teach her new skills, or Math 210, which is well within her domain of knowledge and in which

she’d probably get an A. If Alex is an entity theorist, which class is she likely to select? Do you think entity versus incremental theorists differ in their overall GPA?

ANSWER: As an entity theorist, Alex is likely to choose Math 210, an opportunity to document her existing ability, which she probably thinks of as being relatively fixed. Entity theorists usually don’t take on challenging opportunities for growth, because these might indicate a lack of adequate skills. If Alex were an incremental theorist, she would probably choose the “stretch” class (Math 301) to help her learn new skills, which would be consistent with her concept of her ability. If this pattern played out repeatedly across a student’s college years, you could perhaps predict a lower GPA for incremental theorists, who would take on more challenging opportunities for growth and register for classes that didn’t guarantee high grades. However, research demonstrates that incremental theorists actually end up with higher grades than entity theorists, perhaps due to greater effort expended on academic work.

3. How would you change your college’s first-year welcome program to help reduce achievement differences among students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education (such as Black and first-generation college students)?

ANSWER: The research reviewed in this module suggests several potentially powerful factors that could help underrepresented students perform at their highest potential. First, teaching new students that they are in control of their performance and that they can grow, change, and improve their skill set and intelligence—essentially giving them an incremental mindset about their abilities—could be very helpful. Second, assuring them that everyone has concerns about fitting in and finding friends on campus could help reduce the fear of not belonging, thus ultimately increasing their confidence and ability to achieve. Third, framing the college experience in a way that resonates with an interdependent mindset (for example, focusing on community and collaboration) could help make college a welcoming environment where students could expect their learning to increase their closeness to others.

APPLICATION MODULE 3: SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND THE LAW

1. Suppose your laptop is stolen from your dorm room one night, and a few of your neighbors catch a glimpse of a suspect as they are arriving home from a party. Your residence hall advisor (RA) brings in your neighbors individually to ask them about the suspect they saw. How should your RA’s questions be posed to get the most accurate eyewitness testimony possible?

ANSWER: Given the malleability of memory based on prompting, and given that the witnesses only caught a glimpse of the suspect and may have been inebriated (and thus uncertain about what they saw), your RA should avoid leading the witnesses toward any specific details, such as asking any questions that suggest the perpetrator was of a specific gender, ethnicity, or stature, or that suggest what the person was wearing or carrying. For instance, it would be less problematic to ask “Can you describe the person’s clothes?” than to ask a detail-specific question like “Was the person wearing a blue sweatshirt?” Although it could be tempting to prod for such details, especially if another witness provided them initially, research shows that memory is highly suggestible and changeable and that asking leading questions can alter the witnesses’ memory significantly.

2. If you are in charge of establishing rules for jury deliberation, what can you do to increase the likelihood that minority opinions will be adequately considered? What research findings would you cite to back up your decisions?

ANSWER: You can require a minimum of 12 rather than 6 jurors based on research showing that individuals with minority opinions are more likely to stick to their convictions, rather than quickly giving in to the majority view, if they have an ally. Just based on numbers, the likelihood that more than one juror will hold a minority opinion is greater in a group of 12 than in a group of 6. You can also require unanimous verdicts. Research suggests that juries that don’t have to reach a unanimous verdict spend significantly less time discussing the case. Once they reach the minimum number of jurors required to come to a verdict, they tend to end their discussion, and minority opinions are no longer considered.

3. Maria and Tanya are on the jury in a civil court case that has found the defendant guilty. They must now decide how the defendant should be punished. During their deliberations, it becomes clear that Maria is angered by the defendant’s behavior, while Tanya feels sympathy. Using what you learned in this module, describe the differing attributions that might have led to Maria’s anger compared with Tanya’s sympathy. Which kind of punishment do you think each is likely to prefer?

ANSWER: According to research, the emotion an individual experiences in response to a criminal act, such as anger versus sympathy, drives the type of punishment that person prefers. The emotion depends on the attributions the juror makes about the defendant and the defendant’s behavior. Maria, for example, is likely to experience anger to the degree that she believes (1) that the defendant is responsible for the crime and intended for the crime to occur and (2) that the crime reflects a stable part of the defendant’s character. In contrast, Tanya is likely to experience sympathy to the degree that she believes (1) that situational factors, including the defendant’s upbringing and past history, influenced the crime and (2) that the crime does not reflect a stable part of the defendant’s character

—that is, that the defendant has the potential to change. The emotion a juror experiences in response to the defendant and the crime influences the juror’s sense of appropriate punishment. Jurors who feel anger, like Maria, are more likely to prefer just deserts punishment, wanting the defendant to suffer in proportion to the crime. In contrast, jurors who feel sympathy, like Tanya, are more inclined to prefer deterrence, such as rehabilitation or engagement with the community—that is, punishment that will deter the defendant from committing similar crimes in the future.

4. Thais and Elisa both get speeding tickets and are being punished by their parents. Thais’s parents have a system of rules they follow for punishing all their children, and they calmly but firmly explain to Thais that she will be grounded for a month. Elisa’s parents, in contrast, favor her brothers over her, punish their children inconsistently from week to week, and scream at Elisa for her mistake, but only ground her for a week. Who is likely to feel her punishment is more just, and why: Thais, with her longer sentence, or Elisa, with her shorter sentence?

ANSWER: Although Thais receives a harsher penalty, her experience fits better with the principles of procedural justice. Her parents demonstrate neutrality, have a trustworthy system in place whose guidelines they follow impartially and consistently, and treat her with politeness and respect. Thus, Thais should see her punishment as fair, if a little harsh. Elisa, though she is grounded for only a week, probably feels that her punishment is unjust since her parents do not show neutrality (favoring her brothers), do not have a trustworthy or stable system of guidelines for punishment, and do not treat her with respect. Therefore, even though Thais gets the harsher punishment, Thais may feel that her punishment is more just than Elisa feels about hers.

GLOSSARY

A

acceptance Adopting an open and welcoming attitude to one’s emotions.

actor-observer difference A difference in attribution based on who is making the causal assessment: the actor (who is relatively inclined to make situational attributions) or the observer (who is relatively inclined to make dispositional attributions).

actual self The self that people believe they are.

affect misattribution procedure (AMP) A priming procedure designed to assess people’s implicit associations to different stimuli, including their associations to various ethnic, racial, gender, and occupational groups.

affective forecasting Predicting future emotions, such as whether an event will result in happiness, anger, or sadness and for how long.

agenda control Efforts by the media to emphasize certain events and topics, thereby shaping which issues and events people think are important.

altruism Prosocial behavior that benefits others without regard to the consequences for oneself.

anthropomorphism The attribution of human traits, feelings, and intentions to nonhuman entities.

anxiety dimension of attachment A facet of attachment that captures the degree to which a person is worried about rejection and abandonment by relationship partners.

applied science Science or research concerned with solving important real-world problems.

appraisal The interpretation an individual gives to a situation that gives rise to the experience of the emotion.

approach/inhibition theory A theory maintaining that high-power individuals are inclined to go after their goals and make quick (sometimes rash) judgments, whereas low-power individuals are more likely to constrain their behavior and pay careful attention to others.

attachment theory The idea that early attachments with parents and other caregivers can shape relationships for a person’s whole life.

attitude An evaluation of an object in a positive or negative fashion that includes three components: affect, cognition, and behavior.

attitude inoculation Small attacks on people’s beliefs that engage their preexisting attitudes, prior commitments, and background knowledge, enabling them to counteract a subsequent larger attack and thus resist persuasion.

audience characteristics Characteristics of those who receive a persuasive message, including need for cognition, mood, and age.

availability heuristic The process whereby judgments of frequency or probability are based on how readily pertinent instances come to mind.

avoidance dimension of attachment A facet of attachment that captures the degree to which a person is comfortable with intimacy and dependence on relationship partners.

B

base-rate information Information about the relative frequency of events or members of different categories in a population.

basic science Science or research concerned with trying to understand some phenomenon in its own right, with a view toward using that understanding to build valid theories about the nature of some aspect of the world.

basking in reflected glory Taking pride in the accomplishments of other people in one’s group, such as when sports fans identify with a winning team.

better-than-average effect The finding that most people think they are above average on various personality trait and ability dimensions.

bottom-up processing “Data-driven” mental processing, in which an individual forms conclusions based on stimuli encountered in the environment.

broaden-and-build hypothesis The idea that positive emotions broaden thoughts and actions, helping people build social resources.

bystander intervention Assistance given by a witness to someone in need.

C

central route A route to persuasion wherein people think carefully and deliberately about the content of a persuasive message, attending to its logic and the strength of its arguments as well as to related evidence and principles.

cognitive dissonance theory The theory that inconsistency between a person’s thoughts, sentiments, and actions creates an aversive emotional state (dissonance) that leads to efforts to restore consistency.

color-blindness A diversity ideology that encourages treating others as unique individuals and downplaying or ignoring cultural and ethnic group differences.

communal relationship A relationship in which the individuals feel a special responsibility for one another and give and receive according to the principle of need. Such relationships are often long term.

comparison level Expectations people have about what they should get out of a relationship.

comparison level for alternatives Expectations people have about what they can get out of available alternative relationships.

complementarity The tendency for people to seek out others with characteristics that are different from, and that complement, their own.

compliance Responding favorably to an explicit request from another person.

confirmation bias The tendency to test a proposition by searching for evidence in support of it.

conformity Changing one’s beliefs or behavior to more closely align with those of others, in response to explicit or implicit pressure (real or imagined) to do so

consensus A type of covariation information: whether most people would behave the same way or differently in a given situation.

construal level theory A theory about the relationship between temporal distance (and other kinds of distance) and abstract or concrete thinking: Psychologically distant actions and events are thought about in abstract terms; actions and events that are close at hand are thought about in concrete terms.

construal One’s interpretation of or inference about the stimuli or situations that one confronts.

contact hypothesis The proposition that prejudice can be reduced by putting members of different groups in frequent contact with one another.

contingencies of self-worth The thesis that people’s self-esteem is contingent on their successes and failures in domains they deem important to their self-worth.

control condition A condition comparable to the experimental condition in every way except that it lacks the one ingredient hypothesized to produce the expected effect on the dependent variable.

correlational research Research that involves measuring two or more variables and assessing whether there is a relationship between them.

counterfactual thinking Thoughts of what might have, could have, or should have happened “if only” something had occurred differently.

covariation principle The idea that behavior should be attributed to potential causes that occur along with the observed behavior.

culture of honor A culture defined by its members’ strong concerns about their own and others’ reputations, leading to sensitivity to insults and a willingness to use violence to avenge any perceived slight.

D

death-qualified jury A jury from which prospective jurors who would never recommend the death penalty have been excluded.

debriefing In preliminary versions of an experiment, asking participants directly if they understood the instructions, found the setup to be reasonable, and so on. After an experiment, debriefing is used to educate participants about the questions being studied.

deception research Research in which the participants are misled about the purpose of the research or the meaning of something that is done to them.

dehumanization The attribution of nonhuman characteristics and denial of human qualities to groups (generally to groups other than one’s own).

deindividuation A reduced sense of individual identity accompanied by diminished self-regulation that can come over people when they are in a large group.

dependent variable In experimental research, the variable that is measured (as opposed to manipulated); it is hypothesized to be affected by manipulation of the independent variable.

descriptive norm The behavior exhibited by most people in a given context.

diffusion of responsibility A reduction of the sense of urgency to help someone in an emergency or dangerous situation based on the assumption that others who are present will help.

discounting principle The idea that people will assign reduced weight to a particular cause of behavior if other plausible causes might have produced the same behavior.

discrimination Favorable or unfavorable treatment of individuals based on their membership in a particular group.

dispositions Internal factors, such as beliefs, values, personality traits, and abilities, that guide a person’s behavior.

distinctiveness A type of covariation information: whether a behavior is unique to a particular situation or occurs in many or all situations.

dominant response In a person’s hierarchy of possible responses in any context, the response that person is most likely to make.

duration neglect The relative unimportance of the length of an emotional experience, whether pleasurable or unpleasant, in retrospective assessments of the overall experience.

E

effort justification The tendency to reduce dissonance by justifying the time, effort, or money devoted to something that turned out to be unpleasant or disappointing.

elaboration likelihood model (ELM) A model of persuasion that maintains that there are two routes to persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route.

emotion A brief, specific response, involving appraisals, experiences, expressions, and physiology, that helps people meet goals, including social goals.

emotion regulation The ability to alter one’s own emotional state. It may involve behaviors such as rethinking a challenging situation to reduce anger or anxiety, hiding visible signs of sadness or fear, or focusing on reasons to feel happy or calm.

emotional amplification An increase in an emotional reaction to an event that is proportional to how easy it is to imagine the event not happening.

empathic concern Identifying with someone in need, including feeling and understanding what that person is experiencing, accompanied by the intention to help the person.

entity theory of intelligence The belief that intelligence is something people are born with and can’t change.

equity theory The idea that people are motivated to pursue fairness, or equity, in their relationships. A relationship is considered equitable when the ratio of rewards to costs is similar for both partners.

ethnocentrism Glorifying one’s own group while vilifying other groups.

evaluation apprehension People’s concern about how they might appear or be evaluated in the eyes of others.

exchange relationship A relationship in which individuals feel little responsibility toward one another; giving and receiving are governed by concerns about equity and reciprocity. Such relationships are usually short term.

experimental research In social psychology, research that randomly assigns people to different conditions, or situations, enabling researchers to make strong inferences about why a relationship exists or how different situations affect behavior.

expressive writing Writing about the focal emotions of current stresses and trauma in ways that bring about insight and reduced stress.

external validity How well the results of a study generalize to contexts outside the conditions of the laboratory.

F

face The public image of ourself that we want others to believe.

field experiment An experiment conducted in the real world (not a lab), usually with participants who are not aware that they are in a study of any kind.

fluency The feeling of ease (or difficulty) associated with processing information.

focal emotion An emotion that is especially common within a particular culture.

focalism A tendency to focus too much on a central aspect of an event while neglecting the possible impact of peripheral considerations or extraneous events.

foot-in-the-door technique A compliance approach that involves making an initial small request with which nearly everyone complies, followed by a larger request involving the real behavior of interest.

framing effect The influence on judgment resulting from the way information is presented, including the words used to describe the information or the order in which it is presented.

functional distance The influence of physical layout that encourages or inhibits certain activities, including contact between people.

fundamental attribution error The failure to recognize the importance of situational influences on behavior, along with the corresponding tendency to overemphasize the importance of dispositions on behavior.

G

general aggression model A broad approach to understanding the causes of aggression through a focus on situational factors, construal factors, and biological and cultural contributions.

Gestalt psychology Based on the German word *gestalt*, meaning “form” or “figure,” an approach that stresses the fact that people’s perception of objects involves active, usually nonconscious interpretation of what the object represents as a whole.

group polarization The tendency for group decisions to be more extreme than those made by individuals; whatever way the group as a whole is leaning, group discussion tends to make it lean further in that direction.

groupthink Faulty thinking by members of highly cohesive groups in which the critical scrutiny that should be devoted to the issues at hand is subverted by social pressures to reach consensus.

H

halo effect The common belief (accurate or not) that attractive individuals possess a host of positive qualities beyond their physical appearance.

heuristics Intuitive mental operations, performed quickly and automatically, that provide efficient answers to common problems of judgment.

hindsight bias People’s tendency after learning about a given outcome to be overconfident about whether they could have predicted that outcome.

hostile aggression Behavior intended to harm another person, either physically or psychologically, and motivated by feelings of anger and hostility.

hostile media phenomenon The tendency for people to see media coverage as biased against their own side and in favor of their opponents’ side.

hypothesis A prediction about what will happen under particular circumstances.

I

ideal self The self that embodies people’s wishes and aspirations.

identifiable victim effect The tendency to be more moved by the vivid plight of a single individual than by the struggles of a more abstract number of people.

illusory correlation The belief that two variables are correlated when in fact they are not.

immune neglect The tendency for people to underestimate their capacity to be resilient in responding to difficult life events, which leads them to overestimate the extent to which life’s problems will reduce their personal well-being.

implementation intention An “if-then” plan to engage in a goal-directed behavior (“then”) whenever a particular cue (“if”) is encountered.

implicit association test (IAT) A technique for revealing nonconscious attitudes toward different stimuli, particularly groups of people.

implicit attitude measure An indirect measure of attitudes that doesn’t involve a self-report.

inclusive fitness According to evolutionary theory, an individual’s reproductive success, which ensures the transmission of an individual’s genes to future generations.

incremental theory of intelligence The belief that intelligence is something people can improve by working at it.

independent (individualistic) culture A culture in which people tend to think of themselves as distinct social entities, tied to each other by voluntary bonds of affection and organizational memberships but essentially separate from other people and having attributes that exist in the absence of any connection to others.

independent variable In correlational research, this variable is measured. In experimental research, this variable is manipulated; it is hypothesized to be the cause of a particular outcome.

individuation An enhanced sense of individual identity produced by focusing attention on the self, which generally leads people to act carefully, deliberately, and in accordance with their sense of propriety and values.

induced (forced) compliance Subtly compelling people to behave in a manner that is inconsistent with their beliefs, attitudes, or values in order to elicit dissonance and therefore a change in their original attitudes and values.

informational social influence The influence of other people that results from taking their comments or actions as a source of information about what is correct, proper, or effective.

informed consent A person’s signed agreement to participate in a procedure or research study after learning all of its relevant aspects.

institutional review board (IRB) A committee that examines research proposals and makes judgments about the ethical appropriateness of the research.

instrumental aggression Behavior intended to harm another person in the service of motives other than pure hostility (such as attracting attention, acquiring wealth, or advancing political or ideological causes).

interdependent (collectivistic) culture A culture in which people tend to define themselves as part of a collective, inextricably tied to others in their group and placing less importance on individual freedom or personal control over their lives.

internal validity In experimental research, confidence that only the manipulated variable could have produced the results.

internalization Private acceptance of a proposition, orientation, or ideology.

intervention An effort to change a person’s behavior.

investment model of commitment A model of interpersonal relationships maintains there are three determinants that make partners more committed to each other: relationship satisfaction, few alternative partners, and investments in the relationship.

J

just world hypothesis The belief that people get what they deserve in life and deserve what they get.

K

kin selection An evolutionary strategy that favors the reproductive success of one’s genetic relatives, even at a cost to one’s own survival and reproduction.

L

Likert scale A numerical scale used to assess people’s attitudes; a scale that includes a set of possible answers with labeled anchors on each extreme.

longitudinal study A study conducted at different points in time with the same participants.

M

Marley hypothesis The claim that different racial groups make different assessments of the amount of racism in society today because they differ in their knowledge of racial history.

measurement validity The correlation between a measure and some outcome the measure is supposed to predict.

mere exposure effect The idea that repeated exposure to a stimulus, such as an object or a person, leads to greater liking of the stimulus.

message characteristics Aspects or content of a persuasive message, including the quality of the evidence and the explicitness of its conclusions.

minimal group paradigm An experimental paradigm in which researchers create groups based on arbitrary and seemingly meaningless criteria and then examine how the members of these “minimal groups” are inclined to behave toward one another.

modern racism Prejudice directed at racial groups that exists alongside the rejection of explicitly racist beliefs.

moral foundations theory A theory proposing that there are five evolved, universal moral domains in which specific emotions guide moral judgments.

multiculturalism A diversity ideology that encourages the acknowledgment and appreciation of people’s unique cultural and ethnic identities.

N

natural experiment A naturally occurring event or phenomenon with somewhat different conditions (e.g., before versus after) that can be compared with almost as much rigor as conditions manipulated by the investigator in an experiment.

natural selection An evolutionary process that molds animals and plants so that traits that enhance the probability of survival and reproduction are passed on to subsequent generations.

naturalistic fallacy The claim that the way things are is the way they should be.

negative state relief hypothesis The idea that people engage in certain actions, such as agreeing to a request, to relieve their negative feelings and feel better about themselves.

norm of reciprocity A norm dictating that people should provide benefits to those who benefit them.

normative social influence The influence of other people that comes from the desire to avoid their disapproval and other social sanctions (ridicule, barbs, ostracism).

O

obedience In an unequal power relationship, submitting to the demands of the person in authority.

open science Practices such as sharing data and research materials with anyone in the broader scientific community in an effort to increase the integrity and replicability of scientific research.

ought self The self that is concerned with the duties, obligations, and external demands people feel they are compelled to honor.

outgroup homogeneity effect The tendency for people to assume that within-group similarity is much stronger for outgroups than for ingroups.

own-race identification bias The tendency for people to be better able to recognize and distinguish faces from their own race than from other races.

P

paired distinctiveness The pairing of two distinctive events that stand out even more because they occur together.

perceived partner responsiveness The degree to which people perceive their partners as being understanding, validating, and responsive to their needs.

peripheral route A route to persuasion wherein people attend to relatively easy-to-process, superficial cues related to a persuasive message, such as its length or the expertise or attractiveness of the source of the message.

personal distress A motive for helping others in distress that may arise from a need to reduce one’s own distress.

pluralistic ignorance A phenomenon whereby people act in ways that conflict with their true attitudes or beliefs because they believe others don’t share them. When a great many people do so, their behavior reinforces the erroneous group norm.

power The ability to control one’s own outcomes and those of others.

precarious manhood hypothesis The idea that a man’s gender identity, which significantly involves strength and toughness, may be lost under various conditions and that such a loss can trigger aggressive behavior.

prejudice An attitude or affective response (positive or negative) toward a group and its individual members.

prescriptive norm The way a person is supposed to behave in a given context; also called *injunctive norm*.

prevention focus Self-regulation of behavior with respect to ought-self standards; a focus on avoiding negative outcomes through avoidance-related behaviors.

primacy effect A type of order effect whereby the information presented first in a body of evidence has a disproportionate influence on judgment.

priming The presentation of information designed to activate a concept and hence make it accessible. A prime is the stimulus presented to activate the concept in question.

prisoner’s dilemma A situation involving payoffs to two people who must decide whether to cooperate or defect. In the end, trust and cooperation lead to higher joint payoffs than mistrust and defection do.

procedural justice Assessments of whether the processes leading to legal outcomes are fair.

promotion focus Self-regulation of behavior with respect to ideal-self standards; a focus on attaining positive outcomes through approach-related behaviors.

psychological stress The sense that challenges and demands surpass one’s current capacities, resources, and energies.

R

random assignment Assigning participants in experimental research to different conditions randomly, so they are as likely to be assigned to one condition as to another, with the effect of making the types of people in the different conditions roughly equal.

rape-prone culture A culture in which rape tends to be used as an act of war against enemy women, as a ritual act, or as a threat against women to keep them subservient to men.

reactance theory The idea that people reassert their prerogatives in response to the unpleasant state of arousal they experience when they believe their freedoms are threatened.

reactive devaluation The tendency to attach less value to an offer in a negotiation once the opposing group makes it.

realistic group conflict theory A theory that group conflict, prejudice, and discrimination are likely to arise over competition between groups for limited resources.

reappraisal The process of reinterpreting the causes of an emotion and its meaning for the individual.

recency effect A type of order effect whereby the information presented last in a body of evidence has a disproportionate influence on judgment.

reciprocal altruism Helping others with the expectation that they will probably return the favor in the future.

reciprocal concessions technique A compliance approach that involves asking someone for a very large favor that will certainly be refused and then following that request with one for a smaller favor (which tends to be seen as a concession the target feels compelled to honor).

reflected self-appraisal A belief about what others think of one’s self.

regression effect The statistical tendency, when two variables are imperfectly correlated, for extreme values of one of them to be associated with less extreme values of the other.

regression fallacy The failure to recognize the influence of the regression effect and to instead offer a causal theory for what is really a simple statistical regularity.

reliability The degree to which the particular way researchers measure a given variable is likely to yield consistent results.

replication Reproduction of research results by the original investigator or by someone else.

representativeness heuristic The process whereby judgments of likelihood are based on assessments of similarity between individuals and group prototypes or between cause and effect.

reproductive fitness The capacity to pass one’s genes on to subsequent generations.

reputation The collective beliefs, evaluations, and impressions people hold about an individual within a social network.

response latency The amount of time it takes to respond to a stimulus, such as an attitude question.

restorative justice The process of having perpetrators of harm take responsibility and apologize to those they’ve harmed and for those individuals to express their grievances.

rumination The tendency to think about a stressful event and its causes, symptoms, and implications repeatedly and continually over time.

S

schema A knowledge structure consisting of any organized body of stored information that is used to help in understanding events.

scientific jury selection A statistical approach to jury selection whereby jury selection specialists interview members of different demographic groups in the broader community about their attitudes toward various issues related to a trial, and defense and prosecuting attorneys try to influence the selection of jurors accordingly.

self-affirmation theory The idea that people can maintain an overall sense of self-worth after being exposed to psychologically threatening information by affirming a valued aspect of themselves unrelated to the threat.

self-awareness theory A theory maintaining that when people focus their attention inward on themselves, they become concerned with self-evaluation and how their current behavior conforms to their internal standards and values.

self-censorship Withholding information or opinions in group discussions.

self-discrepancy theory A theory that behavior is motivated by standards reflecting ideal and ought selves; falling short of these standards elicits specific emotions and may lead to efforts to get closer to them.

self-enhancement The desire to maintain, increase, or protect one’s positive self-views.

self-esteem The overall positive or negative evaluation people have of themselves.

self-handicapping The tendency to engage in self-defeating behavior in order to have an excuse ready should one perform poorly or fail.

self-monitoring The tendency to monitor one’s behavior to fit the current situation.

self-perception theory The theory that people come to know their own attitudes by looking at their behavior and the context in which it occurred and then inferring what their attitudes must be.

self-presentation Presenting the person we would like others to believe we are.

self-regulation Processes by which people initiate and control their behavior in the pursuit of goals, including the ability to resist short-term rewards that thwart the attainment of long-term goals.

self-schema A cognitive structure, derived from past experience, that represents a person’s beliefs and feelings about the self, in both general and specific situations.

self-selection In correlational research, the situation in which the participant, rather than the researcher, determines the participant’s level of each variable (for example, how many hours per day they spend playing video games or whether or not they are married), thereby creating the problem that unknown other properties might be responsible for the observed relationship.

self-serving attributional bias The tendency to attribute failure and other bad events to external circumstances and to attribute success and other good events to oneself.

self-stereotyping The phenomenon whereby people come to define themselves in terms of traits, norms, and values that they associate with a social group when their identity as a member of that group is salient.

self-verification theory The theory that people strive for others to view them as they view themselves; such verification of one’ s views of the self helps people maintain a sense of coherence and predictability.

sleeper effect An effect that occurs when a persuasive message from an unreliable source initially exerts little influence but later causes attitudes to shift.

social comparison theory The idea that people compare themselves to other people to obtain an accurate assessment of their own opinions, abilities, and internal states.

social dominance orientation A personality trait that corresponds to a person’ s support for socioeconomic hierarchy and the belief that different groups should occupy higher and lower positions in society.

social dominance theory A theory about the hierarchical nature of societies, how they remain stable, and how more powerful or privileged groups in a society maintain their advantage.

social exchange theory A theory based on the idea that how people feel about a relationship depends on their assessments of its costs and rewards.

social facilitation Initially a term for enhanced performance in the presence of others; now a broader term for the effect, positive or negative, of the presence of others on performance.

social functional theory The broad idea that emotions coordinate social interactions in ways that enable people to meet social opportunities and challenges.

social hierarchy The arrangement of individuals within a group in terms of their relative power.

social identities The parts of a person’s sense of self that are derived from group memberships.

social identity theory The idea that a person’s self-concept and self-esteem derive not only from personal identity and accomplishments but also from the status and accomplishments of the various groups to which the person belongs.

social influence The many ways people affect one another, including changes in attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and behavior resulting from the comments, actions, or even the mere presence of others.

social intuitionist model of moral judgment The idea that people first have fast, emotional reactions to morally relevant events that in turn influence their process of reasoning toward a judgment of right or wrong.

social loafing The tendency to exert less effort when working on a group task in which individual contributions cannot be monitored.

social psychology The scientific study of the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals in social situations.

social reward A benefit, such as praise, positive attention, something tangible, or gratitude, that may be gained from helping others and thus serves as a motive for altruistic behavior.

sociometer hypothesis The idea that self-esteem is an internal, subjective index or marker of the extent to which a person is included or looked on favorably by others.

source characteristics Characteristics of the person who delivers a persuasive message, such as attractiveness, credibility, and certainty.

spotlight effect People’s conviction that other people are paying more attention to them (to their appearance and behavior) than they actually are.

statistical significance A measure of the probability that a given result could have occurred by chance.

stereotype A belief that certain attributes are characteristic of members of a particular group.

stereotype content model A model that describes the nature of common group stereotypes, positing that they vary along the two prominent dimensions of warmth and competence.

stereotype threat The fear of confirming the stereotypes that others have about one’s group.

subliminal Below the threshold of conscious awareness.

subtyping Explaining away exceptions to a given stereotype by creating a subcategory of the stereotyped group that can be expected to differ from the group as a whole.

superordinate goal A goal that transcends the interests of any one group and that can be achieved more readily by two or more groups working together.

suppression An emotion regulation strategy by which people attenuate the outward signs of the emotion.

system justification theory The theory that people are motivated to see the existing sociopolitical system as desirable, fair, and legitimate.

systemic inequities Historical or contemporary laws, policies, practices, and norms that advantage some groups in society and disadvantage others (e.g., genders, racial, or ethnic groups) when it comes to such things as wealth, education, housing, and health care.

T

terror management theory (TMT) The theory that people deal with the potentially crippling anxiety associated with the inevitability of death by striving for symbolic immortality through preserving valued cultural worldviews and by believing they have lived up to their culture’s standards.

theory A set of related propositions intended to describe some phenomenon or aspect of the world.

third variable A variable, often unmeasured in correlational research, that can be the true explanation for the relationship between two other variables.

thought polarization hypothesis The hypothesis that more extended thought about a particular issue tends to produce a more extreme, entrenched attitude.

tit-for-tat strategy A strategy in the prisoner’s dilemma game in which the player’s first move is cooperative; thereafter, the player mimics the other person’s behavior, whether cooperative or competitive. This strategy fares well when used against other strategies.

top-down processing “Theory-driven” mental processing, in which an individual filters and interprets new information in light of preexisting knowledge and expectations.

V

voir dire The portion of a trial in U.S. courts in which the judge, the prosecuting attorney, and the defense attorney interview prospective jurors to determine their potential biases and ultimately select a jury.

volunteerism Assistance a person regularly provides to another person or group with no expectation of compensation.

W

working self-concept A subset of self-knowledge that is brought to mind in a particular context.

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